

Out of the Ruins: Feminist pedagogy in recovery¹

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Asked what effect a more sophisticated musical education would have had on his talent, [Irving] Berlin replied 'Ruin it' (Weatherby, 2005)

I argue that the aim of pedagogy should not be to produce autonomous subjects who are supposedly made free by the information they learn, which is the Enlightenment narrative. Rather, by relinquishing the claim to join authority and autonomy, the scene of teaching can be better understood as a network of obligations.... teaching is a question of justice not a search for truth.... As such, the transgressive force of teaching does not lie so much in matters of content as in the way pedagogy can hold open the temporality of questioning so as to resist being characterized as a transaction that can be concluded, either with the giving of grades or the granting of degrees (Readings, 1996: 19)

The above quote comes from a book entitled *The University in Ruins* which, among other things, argues that universities have lost their role as investigators and producers of nation-state cultures. Readings uses the term ruin to describe the collapse of the nineteenth century version of the university, which has been replaced by the contemporary university mired in a discourse of excellence that serves the needs of the global corporate state. However, St Pierre and Pillow (2000) suggest that ruin can also be used as a metaphor for the Humanism's regimes of truth 'that have failed us' and Weiler (2005), for the collapse of confidence in the Enlightenment narrative of rationality, progress and moral vigour, bringing with it the uncertainties illuminated by the 'posts' vi z. poststructuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism and even post-feminism.

This chapter draws on the ideas of things 'falling apart' and 'coming together' as a general framework for feminist pedagogy. Unterhalter (2003) points out in her comprehensive overview of gender and education as a field, that pedagogy and practice are much neglected areas of discussion and research, although a number of examples are available of what feminist pedagogy might look like. However, in this chapter I do not wish only to explore if feminist pedagogy exists and what it might look like. Rather, like Becky Ropers-Huilman (1998: xix), I also want to examine the 'social forces that continually shape its discourses, practices and interpretations'. Deconstruction rather than prescription will thus be the aim. As already indicated, the era in which I am exploring these ideas may be characterised as in ruins in relation, for example, to progressive educational history or policy, belief in definitive solutions to society ills, or moral certainty. It is an era of scepticism and cynicism of the claims of ideology and state governance. Feminism has both suffered and profited from this situation. Particularly first and second wave feminism as a form of progressive politics has, as we shall see later, become unsustainable as a coherent force. Third wave feminism has sought to explain why this has happened. However, as Lather (2005) argues, terms no longer understood as fulfilling their initial promise do not become useless. Rather 'their very failures become provisional grounds and new uses are derived'. This is the position from which I

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propose to discuss feminist pedagogy – as a productive concept with a ruined history from which we have much to learn.

The first part of the chapter provides a brief overview of feminism as a social phenomenon with a dynamic and complex history. It characterises feminism as ruined to the extent that the present field is highly contested and fragmented even if most feminists agree that the political project of improving the lot of women remains important. Challenges to feminism have come from different directions; from postcolonial theorists who have illuminated the colonial vantage point of much western feminist theorising, from poststructural and postmodern theorists who critique the aim in feminism as merely adding women to the male Enlightenment project, from so-called post-feminism which argues that feminism has lost its pertinence, and of course, from the old enemy, traditional male patriarchal forces and the wish to protect male power. Three examples are given of the ruination, or undoing, of feminism and the implication this might have for the notion of feminist pedagogy. The question is posed: what forms of pedagogy are available, possible and potentially productive in this ruined post-feminist and post-modern world? How might the academic insights of third-wave feminism be applicable to the more concrete worlds of first- and second-wave feminist classrooms or lecture-theatres? This discussion is followed by an exploration of the arguments for and against the realisation of feminist pedagogy. While feminist educators have been concerned with developing an informed practice (or ‘praxis’) based on feminist understandings or theories of how inequalities are produced within education, there have been critiques of recipe or one-size-fits-all prescriptions. The chapter concludes with some sense of moving beyond the fragments of ruin to something worthwhile and feasible.

The arguments offered in the paper draw on international literature on feminism, gender and education, yet are also shaped by the author’s early experience as a primary teacher, and for the last twenty five years or so, researcher of gender issues in education mainly in the UK, but for six years in Sweden and Europe more generally. The perspectives offered are thus largely informed by Anglophone and European dimensions which should be treated with caution at the very least in relation to other cultural settings and social conditions.

Falling Apart and Coming Together: stories of feminism

As a social phenomenon, feminism has been subject to different interpretations. It emerged in different forms, with different titles and meanings, at different times. In the UK, it was variously referred to as 'The Woman Question' (in the nineteenth century), sex differences and sex roles (in the 1950s and 1960s), the feminist, women's or women's liberation movement (in the 1960s and 1970s), and equal opportunities, gender, social justice and social inclusion respectively (from the 1980s onwards). It was termed 'jämställdhet' in Sweden from the 1970s onwards, and 'womanism' by North American black feminists in the 1980s. Recently, the concept of 'gender justice' has been used in Norway to explore the impact of the 'new' women's rights on, for example, work and home patterns, and so-called political correctness and freedom of speech (Holst, 2002). As we shall see later, feminism also emerged in different forms within Europe post-1945 as a consequence of the impact of war on different European nation-states. In order to provide an indication of the ruined state of feminism at the start of the twenty-first century as well as its dynamism, positionality and cultural and historical embeddedness, I briefly, in this section, explore three sets of discourse: *Waves between waves*, which surveys debates between second and third wave feminism that have in many ways churned up the field; *Critiques of white feminism* by black feminists representing the insertion of 'the other' into previous naive feminist discourses of universal sisterhood and

consensuality; and *European feminism(s)* that show clearly the impact of national histories and traumas on the forms of feminism that are practised.

Waves between waves

To speak about a ‘third wave’ of feminism is to name a particular moment in feminist theory and practice (Gillis, Howie and Munford, 2004). Conventionally we have come to understand feminist history in three stages or waves. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminism concentrated on opening up access of woman as a category (and not a class) to political, economic and social aspect of public and private life from which they had been hitherto excluded. The fight was mainly though not exclusively a bourgeois one, although it led in a number of countries to important gains for other groups in, for example, universal suffrage, education for all, welfare rights. The second stage of feminism which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s continued the struggle to extend access and benefit as previously but also fought for a broader agenda that concentrated on factors more affecting women: for example, reproduction, sexuality, domestic labour, violence in the home, and paid working conditions. However, the concept of ‘woman’ that was so unifying at the beginning of the stage (or wave), proved feminism’s main difficulty as it sought to preserve women’s shared interests yet acknowledge and struggle for the rights of difference for, e.g. various racialised and ethnic groups. Third wave feminism emerged from these contestations, drawing in also a new generation of gender scholars (mainly women but some men) who, while having benefited from the efforts of their mothers or grandmothers, identified their own viewpoints and struggles.

However, there is little evidence of a unity of theory to which the third wave adheres, except that it seeks to define itself as different from previous feminisms. It is primarily claimed as the feminism of a new generation, which has rejected earlier conceptions of feminism as embodying a more or less coherent set of values and ideas. Having a more imaginative approach to theorising about, and working with, oppressive forces also seems important. Thus, McNay (2000) argues for a more rounded conception of agency which incorporates how women have acted autonomously in the past despite crippling social sanctions, and how they may act in the future confronted by new gender orders, restructurings and uncertainties. Separation of academic and activist or practical feminism has been a recurring dilemma.

The appropriation of feminism by the academy has a long tradition in the discipline’s history and has resulted in an antagonism by those on the streets to the intellectualising, rather than activating, of feminist discourse (not that the two are necessarily different) (Gillis et al., 2004: 3).

However, third wave feminism seems more attached to the academy than previous waves; partly due to the widening of access to university education (and teaching) for women, partly to the relatively safe and privileged space of the university which makes theorising possible, and partly to the presence of a willing student audience for consumption of new ideas and theories, if not a willingness to engage in political action. Gillis et al. (2004: 3) argue that third-wave feminism exacerbates divisiveness also in the tensions over ownership of the field. ‘Because young women outside of the academy are “doing” third wave feminism, does that mean that young women (and, for that matter “not-so-young” women) inside the academy cannot?’

The idea of 'recovery' has been proposed to insert a sense of continuity and cohesion between the feminist waves. However, this can, following to Zalewski (2000), be understood in several different ways: as a layering by the newer feminism over of the old ones so that they are buried and mainly lost – and thus to be 'recovered'; or as the creation of stronger and stronger layers or linked threads surrounding and connecting feminist theories and practices which draw strength from and 'recover' each other; or in terms of recovery as if from an illness, suggesting a return to more conventional ways of thinking (Zalewski, 2000). Thus, recovery can imply the dangers of annihilation of certain feminist discourses, or the inevitable dialectic of different feminisms, or feminism at worst as a malign, and at best an irrelevant force, which has no place in present intellectual and political debates.

So there clearly is and continues to be dissension (or waves) particularly between second and third-wave theorising, even though for many activists across the world, the issues of second-wave feminism provide a persuasive call to action. Moreover, ideological disagreements between feminists may be seen as productive and indicative of a live intellectual force. Thus, the argument in this chapter is that however understood and however ruined, present-day feminism remains a fertile ground for the development of new ideas in pedagogy, and a powerful discursive and epistemological force within and outside education.

Black feminist critiques

The attempt of unity of second-wave feminism was fractured primarily by its positioning, however benign, as a totalising and excluding elite. From the 1970s onwards the most widespread feminist perspective was that of white, western feminism, which, nevertheless, aspired to represent women across class and racial divisions. In so doing, it became a target of criticism not only from European feminism (as we shall see below) but also from the concurrent black feminist movement which argued that the eradication of inequalities based on supposed racial factors were an essential component of an inclusive feminism. As bell hooks put it: 'Feminist theory would have much to offer if it showed women ways in which racism and sexism are immutably connected rather than pitting one struggle against the other, or blatantly dismissing racism' (hooks, 1984: 52).

Other critics took a stronger stance. For example Amos and Parmar (1984) argued that racism (in addition to sexism) *must* be a concern of white feminists if they are not, themselves, to reproduce racism. This includes: (a) taking the specificities of black women's experiences into account when theorising women's oppression; (b) not presenting black women in the form of stereotypes, and through the lens of white western cultural values; and (c) not relegating black women and their experiences to the margins of women's movements. (adapted from Rätzl, 2001)

However this call to extend sisterhood across racialised borders has been difficult to achieve. For example, disappointed by the absence of a feminist position in Chicana nationalism, Chicana women in the United States in the 1970s looked unsuccessfully to white feminism for support.

Long term coalitions never developed due to the inability of most white women to recognize the class and race biases inherent in the structures of their own organisations. Furthermore, they replicated, in another realm, the same kind of privileging of one kind of oppression over another that had bothered Chicanas in relation to Chicanos. Insisting on the primacy of gender oppression, white feminists

disregarded the class- and race-based oppressions suffered by the Chicana. (Moya 1997: 143).

The problem became defined in terms of the power (in this case of white, western women) to discursively define the field of feminism (and its academic subject Women's Studies) and thus render anyone outside the field as the 'other'. One attempt to resolve this problem for black feminism pointed to the value of a more autonomous position. Thus, in a landmark collection on black British feminism published in 1997, Mirza highlights the importance of identity, agency and a 'place called home'.

In this context [the desire for a 'place'], then, black feminism as a spontaneous yet conscious coalition is a meaningful act of identification. In this 'place called home' named black feminism, we as racialised and gendered subjects can collectively mark our presence in the world where black women have so long been denied the privilege to speak; to have a 'valid' identity of our own, a space to 'name' ourselves...we, as black British women invoke our agency; we speak of our difference, our uniqueness, our 'otherness'. (Mirza, 1997: 4).

However, this identification of a 'place called home' underlines yet again the impossibility of second-wave feminism's early dream of solidarity between sisters.

European Feminist Movements

An important site of feminism and its claims to a realist base is its situated specificity, geographically, historically and culturally. European feminism provides a good example of this. What is now understood as European feminism emerged in the post-World War II settlement and its concretisation and expansion in what we now know as the European Union (EU). European feminists took on the task of developing insights into women's conditions in the enormous social and political upheavals of the post-war period. Kaplan (1992) for example, shows that in European countries with the strongest right wing and fascist regimes and ideologies in the 1930s and 1940s, previous feminist gains were obliterated as women were forced back into the narrowest of roles as procreators and carers. When feminists from these regimes mobilised post-1945, picking up the threads of previous feminist activity was less easy for them than for those with a less fractured history of democratic development such as the UK, USA and Sweden. Different national histories also generated distinctive preoccupations. For example, Italian feminists were particularly hostile to feminist calls for separatism because under fascism, women were 'allowed' a separate if narrow and confined space in public life. Yet each country, as Kaplan shows, also produced feminists across the ideological spectrum.

Each country has its share of liberal, socialist or radical feminists and a share in public protest actions on such issues as rape, abortion and employment. The price for diversity is often fragmentation, which indeed some second-wave movements in Western Europe have experienced (Kaplan, 1992: xxv)

Significantly, feminist movements were associated in Europe with left wing or politically progressive ideas, in particular arising from the student political movements of the 1960s. Yet feminists swiftly created their own spaces signalling 'an interest in a cause which was to take them far from the socialist mainstream into new modes of thought and action' (Lovenduski, 1986:72). Although many national feminist movements in western liberal

democracies were influenced by the North American feminism, stronger and weaker forms emerged, due to specific cultures and politics of the countries in which they were located. Thus in the 1970s, stronger movements emerged in Britain, Holland, Finland, Denmark and Norway with weaker forms appearing in West Germany, France, Sweden and Belgium (Lovenduski, 1986). Feminism in the Nordic countries (especially Sweden) was viewed as lacking a 'radical' edge, mainly because gender-change was assiduously pursued by state governments in their preference for women over migrant workers to make up deficiencies in the Nordic labour market (Baude, 1979; Lundh. 1994). In the newly emergent democracies of Spain and Portugal, feminism came later and developed more slowly, though both had distinctive movements by the end of the 1970s (Lovenduski, 1986).

Meanwhile, in countries within the Eastern European communist bloc (until 1989), there was little evidence of autonomous feminist movements. Indeed, the political party structure which controlled avenues to political power and which set the conditions in which political activism could take place, obstructed such a possibility. Also, while sex-equality was a founding principle in communist states with women having greater access to education and paid employment, this did not result in women's greater participation in economic or political spheres (Lovenduski, 1986). As the male world of liberal democracy was instituted, so too was post-communist feminism. Yet here also different viewpoints emerged about what aspects from socialism might be redeemed in the post 1989 era.

‘[T]hose from Northern and Western Europe defended with passion their reasons and right to retain their own meanings of socialism; those from the East argued equally passionately that a term associated with the decaying and despotic State Socialist regimes of their experience could have no place in their new feminist politics, whilst those from the South defended a much more direct politics of democratic control of the state and the workplace as the underpinning of the socialist feminist project. (Pearson, 1992: 6)

More recently, European feminism has shifted away from national differences towards investigating the new Europe, as equated with the EU, and in particular, whom it includes and excludes. As Walby (1999) shows, the EU developed gender policies which had a significant impact on national governments. However, the impact of EU law varied between member states depending, among other things, on the form of gender relations in existence in each country, and any gains made by organised feminism. For example, for Ireland, entry into the EU forced the removal of the ban on married women working, thus reducing significantly the large wage-gap between Irish men and women's wages while in the case of Denmark, EU policies widened the much smaller wages gap between men and women.

EU policies also drew criticism from feminists. For example, Brine (1999) argues that working class women are marginalised by economic and education policies within the EU, and Einhorn and Gregory (1998:293 & 93-4), that though Europe has become *the* object of desire of those outside the EU, citizenship ‘is effectively denied to black women, ethnic minorities and those with experience of poverty’. However, more positive feminist agendas are also visible. For example Braidotti (2004: 133) argues for a post-nationalist sense of European identity and flexible citizenship, drawing on the feminist politics of location. Here, location is not a specific subject position but ‘a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory’.

A radical restructuring of European identity as post-nationalistic can be concretely translated into a set of 'flexible forms of citizenship' that would allow for all 'others', all kind of hybrid citizens to acquire legal status in what would otherwise deserve the label of 'Fortress Europe'. This mode of citizenship can also be described as 'temporary'. It dismantles the us/them binary in such a way as to undo a strong and fixed notion of European citizenship in favour of a functionality differentiated network of affiliations and loyalties (Braidotti, 2004: 137-8)

Here we can see the impact of specificity on feminism, which is above all a social movement, whether more politically or epistemologically weighted. Particularly useful in the work of Braidotti is the concept of imaginary – of a vision of what is to be.

My question therefore becomes: how do you develop such a new European imaginary? I think that such a notion is a project, not a given; nonetheless, this does not make it Utopian in the sense of over-idealistic. It is even the contrary: it is a virtual social reality which can be actualised by a joint endeavour on the part of active, conscious and desiring citizens. (Braidotti, 2004: 139-140)

Such an imaginary, it argued later, can also play a part in the framing of concepts of pedagogy, say, in our understandings of the kind of teacher we hope to become and the kind of students we hope to produce.

Conceptualisations of feminist pedagogy

Given their diverse roles as scholars, teachers and activists, it has been feminist teachers who have been most interested in making pedagogical interventions in sexist (and racist) practices in their workplaces. This has been understood in terms of the development of an informed practice (or 'praxis') drawing on feminist understandings (theories) of how inequalities are produced within education. Significantly, interest in feminist pedagogy arose initially not from theoretical debates in education or teaching, but rather from practical concerns of feminist school-teachers and university lecturers wishing to address gender and other equality issues in their class- and lecture-rooms. Luke and Gore (1992) suggest that this work grew out of concerns about both the processes of schooling and the claims of critical pedagogues or teachers.

The work has emerged from a growing discontent with the patriarchy of schooling and pointed to the absence of gender as a category of interest or analysis in most pedagogical theory, including those discourses which proclaimed themselves as progressive and critical. (Luke & Gore, 1992: 8).

Here, as elsewhere, motivation to do feminist work arose from the failure of academic disciplines and theoretical frameworks to institute gender as a central and organising concept. The use of pedagogy shifted over the years, as Weiler (2005: 4) points out, away from 'the plain, serviceable, and slightly dowdy act of teaching...to the theoretically informed act of pedagogy [which] marks the teacher's move into self-conscious theory and politics'. Influenced by Paulo Freire's noted text *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, feminist and anti-racist educators developed parallel 'critical' pedagogies to support and challenge Freire's vision. More recently, educators influenced by poststructuralism and postcolonialism have considered pedagogy both in terms of desire (Britzman, date?) and in deconstructing the

workings of white western privilege and cultural assumptions in the classroom. As Weiler (2005) notes, such developments have raised questions about power, representation, authority and performance, and indeed about the whole enterprise of pedagogy.

Feminist pedagogy has generally focused on the importance of *classroom methods* in addressing gender relations and oppression in the school and society more widely, particularly in relation to the role and authority of the teacher, the role of (student) experience; and the challenge of questions of difference. What is envisioned is the availability of an alternative educational experience to that conventionally on offer which above all seeks to encourage students to engage in some form of political or activist work (e.g. as feminists) (Weiler, 1991).

The importance of the *individual experience* of both teacher and student has a central place as has affective as well as intellectual educational domains.

Feminist pedagogy legitimates personal experience as an appropriate arena of intellectual inquiry, and insists on a wedding of affect and intellect. Most feminist educators understand that knowledge is not neutral, that the teacher and students alike bring 'texts' of their own to the classroom which shape the transactions within it (Culley & Portuges, 1985: 2).

Feminist pedagogy, for Lewis, arises from feminist teachers' commitment to reflection on their practice, in particular, in exploring how it relates to *in/equalities in power relations*, the encouragement of *critical thinking* in students and the living out of particular *values in practice*. Lewis identifies the psychological, social and sexual dynamics of the classroom where female as well as male students need to be encouraged to 'develop a critical understanding' aimed at conscious transformation (Lewis, 1990: 469). Methodologically, she uses the notion of 'pedagogical moment' as arising in a specific context when all the elements affecting the classroom come together 'in ways that create the specifics of the moment'. These elements may include the social location of teachers and students, political climate in which they work, and personalities and profiles of individuals in the classroom and lecture room. Lewis sees these moments as *transformative* in enabling greater understandings of the gendered context of classroom practice (Lewis, 1990).

My own attempts, as a teacher educator and research supervisor, to develop a feminist pedagogy (with varying degrees of success) have included organising teacher educator seminars on gender questions and issues particularly pertinent to the teacher education workplace; securing a place for 'values' questions involving gender, interculturalism/antiracism, and sexuality within a curriculum hitherto dominated by school subjects; creating a safe space where the full range of student voices can emerge, and if necessary, clash with, and challenge each other and the teacher; and re-balancing power relations towards the student and away from the teacher (Malmgren & Weiner, 2001).

Following on from this earlier work, Webb et al (2002) in their more recent meta-review of the field, identify six general 'principles' that are usually present in feminist pedagogy:

1. Reformation of the professor-student relationship, i.e. blurring of roles
2. Empowerment, i.e. enabling at least some power to be shared
3. Building community, i.e. collaborative learning through relationships and dialogue
4. Privileging the individual voice, i.e. extending the right to have a voice

5. Respect for diversity of personal experience, i.e. affirmation of personal experience as central component of learning
6. Challenging traditional views, i.e. revealing the social and political origins of theory, research and teaching

Interestingly, few empirical studies have been carried out on the effectiveness of feminist pedagogy, although where this has happened there have been indications of long-term change, at least among some students. For example, Thomsen et al (1995) found that in a class organised around feminist pedagogy, students, especially female, were more likely to self-identify as feminists and become active on women's issues. Moreover these dispositions continued over an extended period of a year or more (Stake & Rose, 1994) and could also be seen when gender was discussed in other classes (Bargad & Hyde, 1991). However, feminist pedagogy has also its detractors and resisters. For example, Markowitz (2005) found that general resistance to feminist pedagogy is three-fold: denial of social facts that contradict students' world view, students' focus on the teacher as an object of animosity as, e.g. male-hating; and refusal to consider alternative explanations for social organisation and functioning. Markowitz further argues that 'moral dichotomies' make it difficult for teachers to engage students in critical thinking about inequality and oppression. 'Simple, morally dualistic frameworks' are not the answer; rather 'it is necessary that the classroom be one place in which they are given exposure to other modes of thinking' (Markowitz, 2005: 53).

Is feminist pedagogy possible?

If the six principles of Webb et al (2002) as above can be said to be a summary of the discursive nature of the field, and given recent studies (also above) on both its effectiveness and the resistances it faces, what can we say about the possibilities of feminist pedagogy? First, the fragmented nature of feminism as outlined earlier in this chapter suggest that pedagogy needs to be pluralized since one pedagogy cannot speak for (or represent) all feminisms. Second, it will come as no surprise that many of the defining features of feminist pedagogy have attracted substantial criticism, in particular, the conception of feminism as a unity; difficulty of applying rhetoric to practice; assumptions of moral value and tone; problems with 'experience' and 'empowerment', and one-size-fits-all proposals.

Conception of feminism

A criticism of feminist pedagogy is that while generally drawing on practical situations located in time and place, the strategies used are then reported in way which presumes that others will share similar understandings and situations to the extent of replicating or applying strategy and analysis. In this sense, feminist pedagogy may be regarded as derived from second-wave thinking, and therefore vulnerable to the general criticisms made by third-wavers of representing a universally agreed feminist position or consensual feminist set of strategies. On the other hand, feminist pedagogy necessarily demands practical decisions, and second-wave feminism's strength is/was in its engagement with practical action. Indeed, however realised, feminist pedagogy at least offers an alternative to more conventional modes of doing and performing in its promotion, for example, of inclusiveness, non-hierarchy and re-distributed power relations. There is, arguably, little to help practitioners in the work of Butler (1999) and other third-wavers who refute foundational claims and definitions, and are better at taking things apart than putting them together.

Applying rhetoric to practice

One of the most difficult tasks of teachers is to realise their ambitions in practice. Formalised lesson plans or course guidelines might offer the promise of 'systematic implementation' but apart from the most hardened programme-learning theorists, most regard teaching and learning as human activities that defy reproduction, systematisation or prediction. It is possible, as I have done, to teach the same topic many times to different groups, and have entirely different outcomes each time, based on perspective of the teacher, composition and interest of the student group, atmosphere in the classroom, time of day etc. Moreover, organising a class on feminist pedagogical principles to include all six principles as outlined above - is probably impossible on a regular basis, in terms of the practicalities of planning, carrying out and realisation. It comes as no surprise that the examples of feminist pedagogy given in the literature tend to be teaching sessions especially oriented towards equity issues rather than to general run-of-the-mill teaching situations.

Moral tone

Taylor (1993) raises the important question of how teachers can create critical or feminist consciousness or way of knowing, without implying an ideological correctness or clashing with the complex desires and subjectivities of female and male students. She argues that feminist practitioners have not only to recognise and, to an extent, support students' resistance to feminism, but understand their involvement in the pedagogical process as a complex interplay of subjectivities in which femininities and masculinities are chosen or constructed, adopted or rejected. In particular, self-righteousness and fervour on the part of the teacher are likely to detract from the overall enterprise, while being 'cool' and engaging in the specific issues of the student group in context may achieve a more productive response.

Experience

As we have seen above, central to the task of feminist pedagogy is the concept of 'experience' in the sense that its appropriation in the classroom is seen in terms both of extending inclusiveness, democracy and participation in the pedagogic process, and also utilising the authenticity of personal experience (whether of student or tutor) as a counter to impersonal, academic forms of knowledge. Accordingly, the unfolding of experience (whether verbally or in written texts) promises insights and perspectives absent elsewhere. Scott, however, challenges this kind of thinking in a land-mark article entitled 'The evidence of experience', first published in 1991, where she poses the question: 'What could be truer ... than the subject's own account of what he or she has lived through?' She argues that while experience serves as a way of talking about what has happened, and establishing difference and similarity of viewpoint, it cannot be seen as incontestable or 'real'. At its point of revelation, she says, 'experience is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted' (Scott, 1991: 777 & 797). Its conscious articulation is already second-hand, of something already passed, and therefore cannot be anything other than interpretive. Thus, when in the classroom, we seek to include individual experience, what we get is not authentic and 'real' but performed, constructed and shaped for the audience at that particular moment for that particular purpose.

Similarly, Lather (1991) argues that we need to understand identification with the self as a social rather than authentic, personal process.

The goal is ...a shift from a romantic view of the self as unchanging, authentic essence to a concept of the 'self' as a conjunction of diverse social practices produced and positioned socially, without an underlying essence' (Lather, 1991: 82).

Researchers (and students and practitioners) therefore need constantly to think against themselves as they 'struggle towards ways of knowing which can move us beyond ourselves' (Lather, 1991: 83). It is this form of critical consciousness that is needed if the attempt at feminist pedagogy is to be realisable.

Empowerment

As we have seen 'empowerment' is key to pedagogies that consciously seek to challenge predominant power relations and orthodoxies. Ellsworth (1992: 91) argues, however, that the forms of empowerment suggested by 'critical pedagogies' (including feminist pedagogy, though she does not mention it by name) are in practice 'repressive myths that perpetuate relations of domination'. On the basis of her experience of working with pedagogies focusing on antiracism, she points to their crushing failure:

I mean that when participants in our class attempted to put into practice prescriptions offered in the literature concerning empowerment, student voice, and dialogue, we produced results that were not only unhelpful, but actually exacerbated the very conditions we were trying to work against, including Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism, and 'banking education'. To the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were 'working through' us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression.

Ellsworth found that despite the intentions of herself and her colleagues, and the students who enrolled on her courses, the form of dialogue employed in the class remained the sole responsibility of the teachers – it was they who enforced the rules of reason in the classroom. Ellsworth argues that while critical pedagogies suggest the redistribution, sharing and giving away of power, and the move away from transmission from teacher to student in favour of a reflective examination of the plurality of moral positions, this in fact does not happen. Even where 'the goal is to give students the analytical skills they need to make them as free, rational and objective as teachers supposedly are to choose positions on their objective merits', perspectives that question the political interests of the rationalising discourse, are likely to be rejected as 'irrational', biased and partial. (Ellsworth, 1992: 98). Ellsworth suggests that, here, empowerment treats the symptoms but leaves the disease unnamed and untouched. In other words, 'empowerment' can only lead to a limited redistribution of power while oppressive classroom discourses of reason and logic remain untouched.

One-size-fits-all proposals

The history of feminism has taught us, above all, that prescriptions of action taken from one place are unlikely to work in another, even if worked-examples mean that we can learn from what has gone on before. Therefore the argument is not that we should ignore the ideas and action of different periods and places. If mistakes are not to be repeated and bad experiences not to be replicated, it is vital that we know our history. The intention of the analysis of feminism briefly outlined in this article is that it that readers are better able to understand the enterprise that has been called feminist pedagogy and their responses to it. However, as I hope I have also shown the one-size-fits-all principle that certain features *constitute* feminist pedagogy (such as those summarised by Webb et al, 2002) is also untenable. Indeed, my and others' attempt to work with them has tended more often than not to end in failure, as in the

case of Ellsworth reported above. Indeed sometimes such pedagogies might make the situation worse by implying erroneously that important issues are being dealt with. A better alternative, I suggest, is to propose a set of *dispositions* toward feminist pedagogy, more in tune with feminist uncertainties and partialities of the present period. This will be the task of the next and final section of the chapter.

Feminist pedagogy in recovery

Given that we have rejected the approach to feminist pedagogy that relies on the presentation of principles or characteristics that should be followed, does this mean that feminist pedagogy is no longer a viable consideration or ambition? My response is that feminist pedagogy as an aspiration and imaginary (Briadotti, 2004) is important, although complicated and unattainable prescriptions have no part in this particular enterprise. Rather, we need to think of developing dispositions which bring us closer to our imaginary. These dispositions constitute what Bourdieu terms *habitus*, a means by which customary social behaviour is ordered by functioning as ‘the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices’ (Bourdieu 1979: vii). These dispositions will be premised on certain assumptions based on our own positioning epistemologically, ideologically, discursively, geographically and temporally. For me, at this present time, they include the following.

First, we need to be clear about where we are coming from – *the form of feminism* we aspire to and whose voice it speaks, and the ideological baggage that we have accrued - and think about how these may be incorporated into our pedagogy. Second, we have to understand that as teachers, we *cannot give away power* – we have it bodily, intellectually and institutionally. Rather, we have to learn to use it productively in such a way as to challenge and deconstruct common-sense assumptions and uncritical judgements in our students and ourselves. Teaching as a network of obligations, as suggested by Readings in the quote at the beginning of the chapter, better denotes feminist pedagogy as a recovered imaginary. Third, it is essential that we work with the *situatedness* and *contexts* of our students, which is not to say that we erase intellectual and demanding ideas. Rather, we have to do the hard work of introducing and translating difficult concepts and ideas so that they will be comprehensible and indeed interesting to, for example, our students at this specific moment in their lives. Fourth, we must expect and even invite *resistance*, for it is only through resistance that we can see that we have succeeded in puncturing complacency and taken-for-grantedness. Fifth, if our pedagogy is to make a difference, if it is to be transgressive, it *will make trouble for us*. If students take our views seriously, we can expect them to challenge the authorities on campus or in the playground, or refuse assignments or challenge professional judgments – all of which will impinge on the way we ourselves might be viewed by our peers and employers.

Where does this leave feminist pedagogy? I suggest that, released from its previous associations with method and virtue, it has become a pragmatic imaginary somewhere teetering on the ruins of feminism yet strengthened by feminism’s continuing dynamism. No more and no less.

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