

The feminist pedagogy is one of the most mutable and most accessible pedagogies; it is also one of the most initially misleading. The basic premise of the pedagogy is to not only bring attention to the unheard voices in the literary world (and dually examine why their voices were over-looked), but to also liberate the student from the traditional patriarchal traps of the classroom. Since its inception in the 1960's, the pedagogy has evolved to include subject-related curriculum and to serve as a *way* of instruction so that, no matter what the subject, any instructor can still subscribe to the pedagogy.

The origins of the pedagogy stem from the communal sharing of ideas and experiences among women during the Civil Rights movement. They discussed not only race, but also how society viewed and, more importantly, treated females. This "second wave of feminism" brought a new awareness of the extent of patriarchal control in society and the "subordination of women spiritually, culturally, and physically" (Jarrett 113). In these meetings, sharing was integral; there was a central idea that because everybody had relevant experiences and contributions to share with one another, they all would learn from each other and thus improve society vis-à-vis improving and empowering themselves. One of the first scholarly pieces that addressed gender inequality in modern times (and its affect on society) was a doctoral dissertation by Kate Millet called "*Sexual Politics*". Jarrett calls the work "a bold analysis of sexism in literature canon" (113). Jarrett also mentions essays by A. Echols and A. Davis, both of which aided in a re-examination of female roles in society as well as other socio-economical issues as well. This new wave of scholarship centered upon the expression of female experiences and resulted in the emergence of a feminist pedagogy. It should be stated that although the works during this time focused upon women experiences and the smashing of the patriarchal structure The focus was not, nor was it ever, directed at censuring men. Rather, it was calling attention to what Friedman called "a problem with no shame" (Jarrett, 113).

The next substantial wave of feminists took place in the 1980's as the pedagogy now included composition and classroom practices (which will be addressed later). Today, the feminist pedagogy finds itself with little resemblance to its predecessors. While female voices still struggle to be heard against the traditional cannon, gender theorists, like Judith Butler use gender construction as an all-encompassing paradigm shift to traditional feminist thought. Will gender construction eventually replace feminist thought? Is feminist thinking a way of the past? Does the term "feminist" still carry with it the negative connotations (so aptly aided by Rush Limbaugh's term 'feminazi')? Those questions remain to be answered. But it is certain that at the rapid pace at which feminist pedagogy changes, a new group of questions will arise.

One of the most challenging and complex issues of a feminist pedagogy is addressing what the female teaching role is in a composition class. The predominance of females in composition teaching is one of the key factors as to why the maternal paradigm within the field is perpetuated. Rubin states that the maternal model is a "non exclusive way to describe any teacher who exhibits those nurturing, caring, supportive qualities traditionally associated with mothering" (59). This maternal model, most critics believe, puts female comp teachers at a distinct disadvantage because they are not seen as an authority, but instead as a feminized mother of yesteryear; with very little power. According to Rubin, this perception is continued because "scholars defend the midwife metaphor and maternal methodologies claiming students learn when the power dynamic in the classroom is shifted in favor of the students" (64).

The female composition teachers that oppose the aforementioned model may take a more authoritative and confrontational stance in their classrooms. Students would not be coaxed or encouraged to see their ideas through as in the Elbow-model classroom, but would need to defend their ideas and be subordinate to the teacher, who would take the reins of the class. However, herein lies the web of catch-22's that make this issue a complexity with no clear answer.

First, I will address the consequences of a female teacher taking the confrontational and authoritative stance in a classroom. This stance does not focus on groups and reinforces the traditional patriarchal system that feminists (and the pedagogy) struggled to suppress and overcome. It does not give students a voice that is equal to the teacher's and therefore goes against the key principles of the pedagogy. Less important, but still worth mentioning is the double standard that applies to male and female teachers. A strong female that takes authority runs the high risk of being deemed a "bitch" and therefore is dismissed by her students whereas the male counterpart would be respected for his headstrong abilities. However, as I described above, the teachers that set-up their composition classes that subscribe to the feminist pedagogy model have not only the stigma of 'the maternal' teacher but also struggle with having no authority and are fulfilling a prophecy they once rebelled against. They are the female with no voice and no power. In other words, it reinforces gender differences and thereby subjugates women to the same suppression of the 60's.

There are many positive aspects of a feminist-structured classroom that perhaps the aforementioned problem overshadows. A hybrid classroom including both authoritative control to the teacher and a supportive and diverse learning environment can lend itself to be feminist, but at the same time avoiding the extremes on either side. Kathleen Weiler, another major figure in feminist pedagogy, stressed the importance of the teacher (whether male or female) presenting themselves as gendered subjects with personal perspectives on gender and race. She encourages teachers to be overtly political, to present personal antidotes, and challenge students on topics (119). The focus is on process rather than the final product as the process incorporates the freedom of dialogue and communal sharing. The students become aware of their experiences in not only their bodies, but of others as well. For example, Butler's book Bodies that Matter address the experience of transsexuals and while reading the actual text may be too advanced for some students, there are ways to nevertheless incorporate the ideas in an accessible manner, as will be discussed later. Ideally, this awareness allows new voices and encounters that were not included in the traditional paradigm to be discussed.

The setting of the classrooms is conducive to small groups and collaborative units. Discussions are lead by the teacher, but the students are just as vital to the learning process. It is important that they have the absolute freedom of expression because no voices in this pedagogy are silenced. Jarrett urges teachers to establish some authority so as to avoid deceiving students into thinking they are equal, but to empower the students through their experiences to instill in them that they have the power to change society (125).

The discussions in the classroom, as I have mentioned, are based on epistemology but also asks students to draw from literature what they have previously may have overlooked. The material does not necessarily have to subscribe to a feminist point of view to be taught in this pedagogy. For example, one could incorporate feminist scrutiny into any reading by examining how the genders are treated in the work or by examining sociological oppression. It cannot be stressed enough that by bringing controversial issues to the surface, the teacher is not forcing the class to subscribe to any position.

I will now briefly mention where I believe the feminist pedagogy has shown the most growth and paved new paths for both students and instructors alike: gender theory. Judith Butler (b. 1956) is the major figure in this offspring of feminist pedagogy. Inspired by Foucault, Butler focuses on understanding gender as a "fluid variable which shifts and changes in different contexts and times (Gauntlett, 2). According to Butler, gender is no more than a performance that an individual "does" or "acts" in certain situations. She forges new ground in believing that

gender is malleable but in also exploring where society gets the ideas as to what constructs “masculinity” and “femininity”. To break free from the act of performing a gender, or adhering to the performance would liberate the self, according to Butler, and allow a change in gender norms.

Butler sites in her influential work “*Gender Trouble*”, that feminism’s mistake is “by trying to assert that women are a group with common characteristics and interests.” (Gauntlett 3). In dividing what is the female experience and what is the male experience, feminism assumes that the two genders are the only options for a human to be. Butler rejects the cultural implications of gender and believes they stifle the individual; instead of an opportunity for a person to choose their individuality over their gender, feminism closed the options. Butler’s thoughts on identity being “free floating” and not connected to a biological body paved the way, according to Gauntlett, to Queer Theory. He defines Queer Theory as “ whatever is at odds with the normal, the dominant or the legitimate. It is an identity without an essence” (3). According to Singh, examining and questioning gender is important because “readers (especially young readers) identify with characteristics of their own gender in the books”(Singh 2)

Planning a curriculum incorporating a feminist pedagogy can be done utilizing any of its dynamic characteristics. In the classroom, the students are given ample opportunity to not only share their beliefs and experiences but also to also peer evaluate papers, journals, projects and to also disagree with others on their beliefs. It is not uncommon for teachers to ask the students near the beginning of the term what they would like to learn and even incorporate material they suggest near the end of the term. This way the student will have a vested interest in the material and/or topic they suggest. If a school does not let an instructor deviate from a given book, one can always bring in supplemental materials, such as essays or short stories.

Incorporating gender studies in a freshman composition class is not as difficult as it may appear. While it would be a stretch to have students read Judith Butler, there are many books and movies that bring the “act” of gender to the forefront. Movies like “Tootsie”, “Some Like It Hot” and “Hedwig and the Angry Inch” all involve the reversal of gender roles and can lead to a discussion that analyzes gender assumptions and raise questions about gender portrayal. Students can also be given general assignments that ask them to pay special attention to gender. In addition, they can be given assignments that ask them to write in the opposite gender (and then the class/peers can analyze the actions or perceptions that the author(s) assumes about the opposite gender). Students can guess the sex of authors on provided samples of writing and even write stories with gender-neutral names and wager guesses on the gender. With all of the examples, small discussion groups (or one general analysis) would be essential to grappling with why we assign certain characteristics to a gender. As Singh examines in her essay, children’s books are an easy place to start with examining gender roles because they are extremely overt and gendered (3). Then a discussion can be lead to asking if this gender assignment is detrimental to young children or if it has any affect at all.

One of the distinct advantages of the feminist pedagogy is that not all of it needs to be incorporated in the classroom. Should an instructor not want to relinquish control to the students, the material they choose and how they present it would still enrich the educational experience for the children and the instructor as well.

The following are a list of books that can be used to discuss areas of gender theory, queer theory and even feminist literature:

Reflections in a Golden Eye- Carson McCullers
Quicksand and Passing- Nella Larson

Middlesex – Jeffrey Eugenides

A Spy in the House of Love – Anais Nin

My Sister's Hand in Mine – Jane Bowles

Selections from the anthology The Woman That I Am Ed. Madison

Jarratt, Susan. "Feminist Pedagogy." A Guide to Composition Pedagogies. Eds. Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, Kurt Schick. NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001

This source gives an extremely helpful and academic history of the pedagogy. Jarratt cites numerous examples of the paramount works that served as the foundations of the pedagogy. The article is divided into the history of the pedagogy and how the pedagogy has evolved since its roots in 1960's.

Gauntlett, David. "Judith Butler." Media Gender and Identity Resources. 1998.

20 September 04. <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-but.html>

Gauntlett's articles provide an extremely accessible introduction to Judith Butler. He provides examples of her work as reference guides as well as venturing to interpret her theories on gender. He provides a glance into where Butler differs from feminism and pinpoints the exact problems that Butler has with feminism. While gender theory may be a result of feminism, Gauntlett contemplates their differences and similarities.

Laska, Sheri. "Annotated Bibliography of Feminist Pedagogy in the Composition Classroom: Feminization, Maternal Paradigms, and Essentialism."

Feminist Pedagogy in Composition. 20 July 98. West Virginia University.

25 September 04. <http://www.as.wvu.edu/lbrady/laska.html>

Laska's bibliography is extremely extensive and very detailed. She uses some of the major scholar's works but also incorporates recent articles on the pedagogy. She goes extensively into the maternal nature of the composition teacher but offers a fair and well-rounded argument for both the teacher who is authoritative and the teacher who is more maternal. While this is only the annotated bibliography, I found it to be one of the most helpful sources as it not only summarized the different works but also helped direct me to more sources.

Lawrence, B. (1995). "Teaching Ideas: Getting into Gender Issues." *English Journal*, (80-82).

Lawrence's article helped hone in on how to make this pedagogy accessible. While some of the more technical pieces I used gave the bare boned facts on the pedagogy, it was necessary to also see how the pedagogy was to be applied. Lawrence brings up the importance of having an open classroom with open discussions as well as suggestions for topics.

"Practicing Feminist Pedagogy in Various Classrooms". *Feminist Pedagogy*. University of Texas. 16 October 04. <http://www.edb.utexas/wie/pmain.htm>

This entire site was by far the most extensive source I found on the pedagogy. It traces the history of the pedagogy differently than Jarratt. The University of Texas emphasizes the different philosophers of what they called "the oppressed" to be the foundation, rather than any specific work. While one does have to take the initiative to find more information on the people they site (Paulo Freire, Carol Gillian), it offers plenty of links to other sources. A warning though- a number of the links are no longer working.

Singh, Manjari. "Gender Issues In Children's Literature." *ERIC Digest*. 1998. ERIC Digests. 25 September 04. <http://www.ericdigests.org/1999/-3/gender.htm>

Singh's research into how girls and boys are portrayed in children's literature provides an easy reference as to how to deal with gender issues in a classroom.

By examining the differences in the most basic stories, students can begin to form opinions on more complex issues dealing with gender. Singh also offers ideas for a classroom discussion. While some of the assignments seemed geared at high school students, it would be easy to incorporate them into a collegiate setting. In addition, the article is accessible enough to be read as class reading material.

Shrewsbury, Carolyn. "Womens's Studies 630 Syllabus". Feminist Pedagogies. 1997. Mankato State University. 30 September 04.

<http://krypton.mankato.msus.edu/cbury/web/Courses97-8/fempedsyl.html>

It was necessary for me to see a blatant feminist pedagogy syllabus because at times I still was unsure of how to apply theory into practice. Dr. Shrewsbury's syllabus not only gives the reading examples but also demonstrates how a teacher can have a strong syllabus with objectives, but still leaves time for students to discuss their own ideas and bring to the classroom their own objectives.