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# FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM: UNDERSTANDING THE CLASSROOM AS A PLACE WHERE KNOWLEDGE IS CREATED AS OPPOSED TO KNOWLEDGE BEING DELIVERED TO STUDENTS

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**Synopsis:**

The purpose of this paper is to look at Feminist Pedagogy, which is an exploratory and interactive form of teaching. This paper compares feminist pedagogy in contrast to the traditional method of teaching—lecturing, so I will use it only as a comparison of how feminist pedagogues ensure that teaching is about dialogue and cognitive learning instead of only a teacher speaking and students listening.

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to look at Feminist Pedagogy, which is an exploratory and interactive form of teaching. I want to look at the teacher's role in encouraging student participation and the practice of cognitive learning in university classroom; I also want to look at how a feminist pedagogue ensures that issues of oppression are tackled. This paper compares feminist pedagogy in contrast to the traditional method of teaching—lecturing, so I will use it only as a comparison of how feminist pedagogues ensure that teaching is about dialogue and cognitive learning instead of only a teacher speaking and students listening. The relationship and power structure within a classroom is common and often assumed when a teacher with full authority comes in the classroom, gives a lecture and the students, as receivers, are supposed to learn from the teacher's point of view; there is no room for discussion, or as bell hooks says there will be no room for transgression.

This paper asserts education should be a two way street of learning where the teacher knows he/she has authority in classroom because of his/her education but instead of using it for control and to show power, the teacher should be a facilitator allowing the classroom to be a place where ideas are developed as well as exchanged. Students should be allowed to use their life experiences and their ability to think critically to achieve their educational goals. With this type of learning, students will have a better grasp of what the real world is like where nobody feeds them answers; they have to develop their own strategies to stand out in a crowd. Race and class are also connected to gender discussions because the three are interconnected so there may be some reference to them in my paper but class, in particular, will not be a focus.

There is a need for research into how a classroom operates. United States is a melting pot of social, racial and sexual diversity. In order to understand oppression and to have a safe place to explore oppression requires an environment in which both the privileged and the underprivileged groups can come together to talk about their experiences without fear of being silenced. This does not mean that discussions will be experience based only. The teacher, with the power vested in him/her has to facilitate the class to ensure that discussion is text related, and that students are cognitively engaging the material to their experience and interaction with the world outside the classroom. As Bernice L. Hausman, an associate professor in the Department of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University says, “The use of feminist pedagogy in the classroom means that students are responsible for the creation of knowledge than they are in a traditional classroom.”

Hausman’s statement allows me to move to the next possible question, “Why feminist Pedagogy?” There are other names given to the facilitative method where teachers do not use lecturing as a method of teaching, so how different is feminist pedagogy? Again, I will refer to Hausman’s statement,

A feminist classroom focuses attention on the interested, or political, nature of all interpretations. Students are never required to hold any particular view; students will be required to understand both their own views and views that they do not agree with. Feminist theory and pedagogy require students and faculty to understand *and be responsible for* the particular positions that they take up, defend, and espouse. That means realizing the political, social, and economic stakes in any idea, theory, or action.

The goal of the feminist classroom is to ensure that students understand that knowledge is created through life experiences, but in order to understand experiences in a duality of privilege and underprivileged, oppressor and oppressed, master and slave etcetera, students have to look objectively at issues and defend their position. This also means that a feminist classroom allows students to welcome new ideas and objectives which they can use to either support or debunk their previous positions. Another thing to consider about a feminist classroom is that it looks at issues of race, class and gender, especially from the lens of the oppressed.

Statement of Objectives:

This research will enable me to explore the benefits of the feminist pedagogy and the risks associated with this form of teaching. I want to:

- Explore the students' expectations of their teachers
- Listen to what the students want to learn versus what the teacher wants to teach
- Observe how matters of gender, race, and class, and socio-economic and political issues are addressed in a feminist classroom.

I have used three forms of research methods for this project along with resources compiled by experts who have already done research in this field:

- Observation in classroom
- Group surveys
- Case studies- that will look at the student orientated learning method from the student's perspective

I am, particularly, interested in looking at how a university classroom operates using the most common mode of teaching, that is, lecturing, and the new method that allows for cognitive learning. I will look at who speaks a lot: men or women; expectations/ stereotypes of a pro-

feminist teacher; gendered remarks amongst students; and who gets the most attention from the teacher: males or females.

However, I must admit that my research is not very large in scope; I am just scratching the surface, so to speak. There is a lot more that needs to be done; but for now I am familiarizing myself with the concept of feminist pedagogy and its practice in patriarchal realm of higher education.

### **What is feminist pedagogy?**

A classroom where students have no part in creating what they are taught is not a place where leaders for the future are made. Instead, we will have a population that agrees with everything set forth by the lawmakers whether right or wrong, without questioning the legitimacy of the law/ policy; without thinking about their interests people will give in to the power of the oppressor to manhandle them as they choose. Although, it is true that many radical thinkers have emerged from this system, but we have to admit that they chose to think outside the box, so to speak. They chose to transgress from the norms of the traditional classroom in order to find their niche. Education is about change, complexity, and creation; it is about cognitive learning through communication between the student and the teacher.

Without interaction, information is not valid, because it does not question the information; it does not challenge the idea. Put simply, without communication students become puppets for the amusement of the teacher, who can shape the students just the way s/he prefers. If knowledge was just about learning someone else's idea then attaining a college degree may just be about legitimizing someone else's theory; couldn't we all just read books and learn



theories and ideas at home? Why pay thousands of dollars for four years of undergraduate education when all we have to do is produce people who are good followers?

Although it is true that teachers have the education and the power vested in them to ensure that students receive quality education, how can a teacher know what is good for the students? Each student comes to school with a different agenda, teaching all of them in a same format is not going to work. This is evident in the grades that determine where each student stands in the class even though everyone gets the same information, at the same time, by the same teacher. One form of teaching that attempts to address education from the student's perspective is feminist pedagogy. This form of teaching emphasizes the importance of student experience. It acknowledges that a student is also a teacher and a teacher is also a student, and that knowledge is a process instead of an end result.

Feminist pedagogy is a form of teaching that puts an emphasis on cognitive learning, where the students and the teacher come together as learners, instead of the traditional form where the teacher assumes full authority in the classroom. In the traditional classroom the teacher lectures and the students assume the passive, receptor role. The students, as receivers, are supposed to learn from the teacher's point of view; there is no room for discussion. Feminist pedagogy falls under the overarching umbrella of transformative education where many educators are shifting towards a facilitative form of teaching. Under the new paradigm, knowledge is jointly constructed by students and teachers; and students transform from "passive vessel to be filled by faculty knowledge" to "active constructor[s], discoverer[s], and transformer[s] of knowledge" (Fink, 19). In this sense, feminist pedagogy is one part of the new way of teaching students but there is one most important aspect in this method that is not available in other areas under the new paradigm; this is that feminist pedagogy looks at

education through the lens of oppression and attempts to look at racial, sexual, and social diversity and inequality and it recognizes that students' experiences shape their perspective on any given topic.

Since feminist pedagogy is recently getting awareness, there is not a standard definition for the term but Bernice Hausman, Associate Professor Department of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia, does a good job of providing a detailed description. She says,

Feminist Pedagogy is a theory about teaching, about institutions where learning occurs, and about democratic creation of knowledge. Teachers who use feminist pedagogy believe in establishing a collaborative learning environment where student ideas count as contributions to knowledge; they also believe that students must learn to be responsible for their learning...It is important to understand that the use of feminist pedagogy in the classroom means that students are more responsible for the creation of knowledge than they are in a traditional classroom...A feminist classroom will focus attention on the interested, or political nature of all interpretations. Students are never required to hold any particular view; students will be required to understand both their views and views that they do not agree with. Feminist theory and pedagogy require students and faculty to understand and be responsible for the particular positions that they take up, defend, and espouse. That means relating the political, social, and economic stakes in any idea, theory, or action.

This is a mouthful but clear interpretation that dismantles the conditions set forth by authority, power, and control. This forming of teaching states that any student, without fully understanding

why a particular view is important, yet because the authority figure says it is important so the student decides to own that view, will not learn anything because s/he can not relate to it. If, however, the student can see the interconnectedness between his/ her experience to the concept, s/he can either agree or disagree with the idea but the student will also be required to defend his/her position.

Together with this, Hausman says that teachers should not spoon-feed information to students. Students have to take responsibility for their own learning and instead of absorbing information students have to engage in problem-solving. Problem-solving will encourage students in looking at complexities of any issue or idea. Not only will it provide them with better understanding, it will also allow students to look at various perspectives on issues. This will allow them to become open-minded.

Additionally, Hausman says that students in a feminist classroom will focus attention on the “political nature of all interpretations.” This means that students need to practice cognitive learning and always ask “why” when looking for an answer or solution. Students have to understand the socio-economic and political nature of every idea and ensure that their answers are critical as well as objective.

According to Nancy Buffington, author of *When Teachers Aren't Nice: bell hooks and Feminist Pedagogy*, “Feminist teachers stress process and revision instead of the ‘male’ product. They foster the personal, the subjective and the tentative instead of the ‘male’ objective, argumentative, and adversarial style” (4). Buffington sees the traditional method leading to competition with others; this in turn leads to capitalism and unequal distribution of resources. She argues that teaching should be an interactive process where students and teacher work together to enhance cognitive learning. As opposed to using hierarchical power structure where a

teacher sees his/her role as the know-it-all and the student sits and absorbs all that the teacher says instead of having the courage or being allowed to state his/ her opinions and discussion on a subject matter. By coming together as a group, students and teacher become one entity trying to search meaning and relate to an idea or theory collectively where everyone feels involved.

When education becomes a means of bringing together a group of thinkers, it stops being an unknown, alien idea; it builds community and encourages camaraderie. This type of learning makes the traditional form of education about alienation and competition. In the traditional lecture mode, where student and teacher, and student and student are treated as separate entities, there is competition for becoming the most intelligent, most knowledgeable, and most well recognized. The teacher, first and foremost, asserts an aura of being the most well versed in the field s/he is proficient in, thus requiring respect and special privilege for the education s/he has. Amongst the students also, there is an invisible hierarchy determined by privileges of race, class, and sex. A minority student for instance, who has always been told that his/her goal is to emulate what the majority group has to say, will not speak up about his/her experience, instead s/he choose to stay quiet and listen to the teacher and the majority students while trying to disregard his/her experience as invalid because the teacher has a different perspective that does not shed light on the student's experience.

Paulo Freire, the author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, calls the traditional form of teaching the banking concept of education, where “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (58). He argues that this form is similar to the role of an oppressor on the oppressed: “The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence— but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher” (59). When

absolute forms of oppression seem to have been abolished the traditional form still remains in place, reminding us that we still live in an oppressive, capitalistic, patriarchal society that still uses the model of oppression to feed their hunger for control, and mass producing subjects who believe in competition and separatism. Feminist pedagogy, on the other hand, encourages everyone to work together; the common goal is to find a legitimate answer that is well supported with logic. The power of authority shifts from teacher to students as they decide what they want to learn, and the teacher becomes the moderator ensuring that the discussion is text related and that everybody has an equal opportunity to be in the spotlight.

Feminist pedagogy has its own problems that prevent students from attempting to accept the benefits in this form of teaching. Oppression as a result of race, class, and gender are very sensitive topics that many teachers are afraid to talk about. The only legitimate reason seems like the fear that the classroom will turn chaotic and emotions will run high when the privileged and underprivileged come together to find a common ground to discuss oppression. But without trying we will never know what works and what doesn't. Courses pertaining to race, class, and gender are often deemed too emotional and less rational;

Classes about difference, diversity, and oppression are perceived as more political, first because the emergent knowledge comes from the 'margins' and students may feel 'emotionally attached to the dominant set of knowledge claims because they learn to morally interpret the epistemology of 'positivism.' The belief is that 'some voices speak more "truth" than others, additionally students have been trained to believe that "voices from the 'center' should speak more 'truth' than others (Markowitz).

In doing so, those in the margins idolize the "truth" spoken from the center and they continue to remain in the margin because they have been either trained to second guess their experiences,

their experiences have been disregarded, or they have been told by people in their own groups that their experiences mean very little or nothing; that in order to be successful they have to do as they are told by people in the center.

Another reason why feminist teaching brings anxiety to students as well as teachers is because feminist teaching is influenced by the male authoritative, structural environment that it is being practiced in. As Becky Ropers-Huilman, author of *Scholarship on the Otherside: Power and Caring in Feminist Education* says, "Feminist pedagogy is not 'pure' practice. It is affected not only by participants, but also by the institution in which it takes place." She argues that the feminist paradigm is situated in an environment that has been organized, for centuries, under authority and control; so even though it may consider education as a road to freedom, it still gets its ideas from an authoritarian institution. So there are limitations on how the feminist pedagogy is practiced. One reason why the traditional form seems to remain popular is because it seeks to create like mindedness in thinking, whereas the new paradigm, within which the feminist pedagogy is situated, seeks to identify problems and to ensure that each individual can learn to situate the concept/ idea as to how s/he can relate to the world outside the classroom. Although feminist pedagogy faces patriarchal threats, it is worth the problems because its goal is to create awareness and dialogue about oppression so that both the privileged and under-privileged lot can work in solidarity against oppression.

## **Results**

In order to understand how a classroom functions, I decided to use three forms of research in the project. These include: classroom observations, student surveys, and case studies. My goal was to see the classroom from the other side- as a student transitioning to the teacher's side; I wanted to see how interaction occurs in a facilitative feminist pedagogue's classroom. As a teaching assistant for Dr Knowles in Writing 115, I had several opportunities to lead the class discussions- this being my first attempt at practicing feminist pedagogy and attempting to involve the whole class into speaking.

The idea to use these methods seemed pretty vague when I joined Dr. Knowles in her writing class. Observation was the only logical option I had until Dr. Knowles suggested I use more than just observations to study student participation. I decided to use simple survey questions because the writing 115 students were first term freshmen, most of them just out of high schools. Therefore, the questions were mostly about stereotypical notions of students and teachers, as well as males and females.

When I realized that student survey was not going to be a very good tool to listen to the students' perspective, I decided to do case studies whereby I could talk to several students about their classroom experiences. Prior to this term, I had done my gender studies internship at Portland Community College, in Portland Oregon, where I interviewed about twenty students for an anthology of student success, so I was quite comfortable with this one-on-one approach. It was reasonably easy to develop the questions because each of the questions reflected my own experience as a student sitting in a classroom, afraid to speak fearing ridicule by fellow students or even the professor.

### Classroom Observation

In a feminist classroom, I found the atmosphere of support and a lot of opportunities for communication and interactions between student and student, and students and teacher. But at the same time there were difficulties that required the teacher to exert power in the classroom in order to ensure that all the students were participating in the class.

Making sure that everyone is engaged in classwork is probably one of the difficult tasks of a feminist pedagogue because it requires paying close attention to all the conversations being carried on in the group discussions. In a traditional classroom, the lecturer will be in the spot light, so students who decide to start their own conversation are going to be easily found and the teacher can ask the students to either keep quiet or take their conversation outside the classroom. In a facilitative class, where the class is supposed to be interactive, it becomes difficult to find who is disrupting the class; students take on the responsibility for their own studies and how much they want to get out of the class. Either way, students are supposed to be held accountable for their actions in the classroom.

### Student -Teacher Interaction

I found that in a feminist pedagogue's classroom students assume that the teacher is passive, especially if the feminist pedagogue is female, the stereotypical 'mother' nurturer role is expected of her. Students in the classroom were freshman so they still had the high school mentality where they were used to the traditional method of education.

They expected the teacher to keep them on track and provide them with a sense of direction about their class participation, paper requirements, and homework. I wonder why



students feel that the teacher should do everything for them? If for instance, the teacher grades a paper draft and makes all the corrections on the draft, the student will go back and plug all the grammatical and spelling corrections by the teacher and submit the work back to the teacher. The student will not, however, learn why the teacher made those corrections; the student will rely on the teacher to provide all the feedback for the work. In that way the teacher is grading his/her own paper or writing down what s/he thinks is good, then it ends up being the teacher's paper instead of the student's. It may be easier to do the corrections for the students but it will not help the students learn from their mistakes. Students become dependant on the teacher. In a feminist classroom students are entrusted with the responsibility to ask for help and ask questions in order to understand.

Students are encouraged to ask questions, observe, think, and give opinions, which they, perhaps, stopped doing when they started grade school. It is interesting that when children are growing up their minds are inquisitive and they are always asking "Why?" but years of parents and adults in their lives telling them to stop asking and just listening and not questioning the adult/ authority, they take that on for their life; but when out of nowhere, there is a teacher telling them that it's okay to question and explore, it seems too good to be true. Students hesitate and also become defensive about how much they want to share about what they know. They have been trained to listen to authority, because, assumably, authority has all the right answers.

While some students are comfortable speaking up, others may take a while to find their strength to come to voice. A feminist classroom, I observed, in terms of gender, while making the female students comfortable in talking, makes male students far more comfortable. Some may say it allows male students to show more vocal prowess if a teacher is nurturing and supportive but it also makes some male students challenge the teacher more easily or make aside

comments that include sarcasm. I observed one male student, in particular, who was very vocal in the class, who knew that he was vocal, he often apologized before making a comment but he was ensured that his voice was heard whether it was his experience or just his opinions. There were times when the other students in the class called out his name when the teacher asked a question. Other times they commented that the vocal male student had the answer to whatever the teacher was asking. This form of behavior inhibits other students who probably repeat an answer two or three times in their minds before raising their hands instead of just shouting out the answer.

The teacher's role best suited for situations where one male student takes over the class, because he is the loudest and maybe most confident, would be to ensure that other students including females and minorities get a chance to speak. One way the teacher did this was to start at one end and ask everyone to say how they feel about a situation or an issue; or as bell hooks says,

My classroom style is very confrontational. It is a model of pedagogy that based on the assumption that many students will take the courses from me are afraid to assert themselves as critical thinkers, who are afraid to speak. The revolutionary hope that I bring to the classroom is that it will become a space where they can come to voice. Unlike the stereotypical feminist model that suggests women best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety (one in which we are all going to be kind and nurturing), I encourage students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk. The goal is to enable all students, not just a few assertive, to feel empowered in a rigorous critical discussion (Talking Back 53).

Hooks argues that students need to learn to speak and be assertive and a teacher's goal should be to make sure the student says something. She says that having a confrontational model of teaching places attention on every student whether s/he is vocal or not. Clearly, this method acknowledges that some students are afraid to speak but learning can not occur without dialogue. And dialogue is important to project opinions, ideas, arguments, and counter arguments. The fear of speaking is deeply embedded in the perception of the self as unimportant or seeing the self as just a follower. Despite the belief that people need a kind and nurturing environment to come to voice, it is not so because the real world is, unfortunately, about competition and self-sufficiency. Therefore, hooks says, classroom should teach more rather than less real issues, otherwise the teachers are not doing justice to students.

Should the teacher state that the students can either speak during their turn or pass? While it is okay to give students this choice, what happens if seventy percent of the class decides that they will pass the question posed by the teacher? It is not fair to the rest of the students who take the risk to tackle the question in front of the entire class. The best possible answer seems to be that the teacher should explain how the class will run when s/he meets the students on the first day of the term. As hooks says, "In a feminist classroom, it is important to define the terms of engagement to identify what we mean when we say that a course will be taught from a feminist perspective...it is important for feminist professors to explain not only what will differ about the classroom experience but to openly consider whether they wish to be in such a learning space" (Talking 53). If teachers practice this then students become responsible for their presence from the beginning and they understand their role in the class.

Another way a teacher can involve all students is by doing readings where all students have a paragraph or two they read in class from the text. Initially, I used to feel fear of reading in

class, even in college, because I felt that students will laugh if I made any pronunciation errors, but I came to find out that in the classes that I was asked to read, I was more vocal in those classes. It felt like students were already used to my voice, so it became easier to talk.

In order to ensure that all students speak in the classroom, Buffington says that on the first day of classes she gives a handout that states her expectations and approaches. She says, “I encourage disagreements here; my handouts read, ‘I expect and hope to see many differences of opinions come up...while I think disagreements can be healthy and productive, I expect that we all respect each other’s ideas and feelings.’ About in class discussions, I stress participation, saying that ‘I want to make sure no one (including me) monopolizes the conversation’” (9). By stressing the importance of each student’s participation, first the teacher acknowledges that each student is important, second, s/he is laying out the expectations, and finally by saying “including me” she lets students know that they are equally responsible for and have authority to speak their mind in the class and to create knowledge as a community.

By making a statement like Buffington does, the teacher gives away some of the authority and lets students know that s/he is a learner like them. She will listen to what they have to say. However, as Nina Bayer, author of *The Feminist Teacher of Literature: Feminist or Teacher?* says, “Students unfamiliar with feminist approaches to literature are apt to find the interpretative strategies of a feminist teacher strange, perhaps counterintuitive” (63). Not just literature, any type of material that students are used to being delivered to them, when they find themselves doing the work that requires them to think cognitively will appall the students, making them think that it’s the teacher who is not doing his/her job right; the teacher is deviating from the norm.

To a student who has never been told to ask or has been silenced when s/he asked, this

one step towards taking control of one's learning seems mind boggling and fearful. Where as previously s/he used to be told to look up to the teacher for knowledge, all of a sudden s/he is given the rein to her/his own chariot; where as s/he once used to be on the backseat, suddenly given the driver position becomes unsettling and chaotic because this requires focus, direction, and destiny in mind. In a feminist classroom a student has to know "What do I want out of this class;" this helps the student focus.

There's a fear of change when deviating from the "normal" way of teaching that students are used to from grade school until they graduate from high school; facilitative teaching seems unorganized and unproductive, because it dispels competition- which is a component of traditional method; students feed off of competition because traditional teaching promotes individuality. Another reason is because it makes students come out of their comfort zone. Nobody wants to look within and reflect on learning as how it relates to them, nobody wants to think about problems and when a feminist teacher questions the complexity of an event and wants students to explore rather than describe, s/he makes them take on an active role, which they may have never done before.

The student does not take the teacher seriously if s/he believes the teacher is not teaching in a "serious" style, which, as Paulo Freire says, is the style of the oppressor where the teacher uses control and power to keep the students in control. Why do students want to be forced to do something, instead of recognizing that the teacher is allowing them the freedom for creativity and expression? A good example of students requiring power and a forceful teacher is an incident I observed in the WR 115 class when the teacher asked me to lead the class; as it was the day before Thanksgiving break, not a lot of students were in class so we decided to let the class go after half an hour of peer response groups. I told the students to get into groups of two

with students that they had not worked with for sometime, and read out their paper. In the peer groups students read aloud their papers and the listening students are supposed to provide feedback about what was working in the reader's paper and what could be improved.

As I observed in one group, only one male student read his paper, while the female student said her paper was bad and she was not going to read it. While the male student was reading his paper, the pair was joined by three other male students. After the student was done nobody provided him with feedback, worst of all, nobody else shared his/her work. Ten minutes into the class, the group claimed that they had completed their peer response when the teacher asked if they were done. When everyone was leaving, the male student said that he was the only one who read his paper. The teacher asked the others if they wanted to get credit for showing up to class, one male student had already left at that point. However, the rest of the students wanted to get credit for attendance so they decided to regroup and exchange papers instead of reading out loud.

One of the male students said that he read the paper and found it good. The teacher asked him to comment on it so that the writer could see what the reader liked or thought that could be improved. The male student said he did not know what to write; he stood staring at the paper for several seconds before he wrote something and showed the paper to the teacher for approval. When the teacher said "good," he handed in the paper and rushed out the door. By the way, while the rest of the group was reading, the male student who had left without reading showed up and joined the group.

This incident seemed rather dramatic. I felt like I was observing a grade school child being forced to do a task which he was either not willing to do or thinking that he could not do it. The teacher was just making sure that all the students were held accountable for their class time

and out of respect for the one student who read his paper, they all could at least do the same and provide feedback. It was not like they were asked to do something totally out of context; they had been doing this for the past eight weeks in the class. The teacher had to intervene to ensure that everybody was treated equally, yet to few students that may have seemed that the teacher was being authoritative and controlling.

Students like the ones that I described above may just need the teacher to exert power in order to get the work done; because they have been nurtured to believe that they cannot do anything right if they have the freedom to do so. Such students will struggle in feminist classrooms; yet as Laurie Finke says removing signs of authority and struggle will do nothing to alter the powers invested in us by the social and institutional politics of the educational process itself (qtd in Buffington 5). Buffington, in agreement, asserts that “It’s neither honest nor fair to pretend that we’ve given up all our authority. In short, we can’t turn the classroom into a class womb.” Finke and Buffington reiterate that feminist pedagogy is practiced within the authoritarian, power structure and freedom is given to students in the dichotomy of slavery that is ingrained in their mind since they were in elementary school; they will, no doubt, resist because the dualities are extremely opposed to each other

Traditional Teaching

New Paradigm

Control

Liberation

Captivity

Freedom

Passive

Active

Repetitive

Creative

Learning from others experiences

Thinking outside the box

Follower

Leader

The tool to move from one extreme to another, if not offered to the students, it may just confuse them to the extent that instead of looking at the hole in the system (which requires cognitive thinking) they may think the teacher is incompetent because they do not know how to teach. Buffington questions how power, conflict and struggle should be handled constructively in a classroom. She asks “What does a feminist pedagogue that acknowledges even focuses on struggle look like?” She looks to bell hooks for answer in her book *Talking Back*, in which hooks says, “Feminist Education– the feminist classroom– is and should be a place, where there is visible acknowledgement of the notion of theory and practice, where we work together as teachers and students to overcome the estrangement and alienation that have become so much the norm in the contemporary university” (51). Hooks says that feminist pedagogy should engage students in a learning process that makes the world “more rather than less real” (51); where each student understands how s/he is a part of the world. A good example of this would be, for instance, a Black student learning the history of U.S. should not have to agree with the lecturer on how Rockefeller or General Motors succeeded through hard work but s/he should be able to acknowledge how black slavery enabled Rockefeller in his success. Similarly in my classroom observation, the students who just wanted to get by listening to only one reader, had to learn that education is not about getting by; each one is an active participant in the formation of knowledge; after all they are paying tuition, so why not make a better use of the money spent.

### *Student to Student Interaction*

Majority of the student interaction happens in group discussions. According to my observation in WR 115, the male student who was the most vocal in the class was always looked at when the teacher posed a question or wanted student input. He seemed to be the loudest, thus



making other students uncomfortable to speak because while they raised their hands, he blurted out anything that he had to say. Other male students, who also had good ideas and opinions, were usually quiet until the teacher called their names.

In one case after the midterm, the teacher announced that students should not ask about each others grades because those that did not pass the midterm maybe uncomfortable telling their grades. Yet, the most vocal male student, who did pass, asked another male student whether he passed. The teacher was busy distributing other students' portfolios and I was sitting and watching the interaction going on amongst the two male students.

The other male student had not passed the midterm because he did not have the required amount of tutor slips in his portfolio. The vocal male student was standing up as he was packing his bag and started questioning him; it was more like an interrogation about how could he be so incompetent. He was making comments like "Dude, I can't believe how you could not see the tutor. We have tutoring in the gym every night, how come you couldn't visit them? What you mean you didn't have time?" That's just crazy dude." The other student sat listening to him. Here too, the most vocal student did not show respect to the teacher's request nor empathy to the student who was not able pass the midterm. In a traditional classroom, as a result of individualism and competition, the students do not have to get together for discussions that make them familiar with each other, so maybe the student who did not pass wouldn't have had to listen to the crude remarks of the other student if he had not interacted with him to the point of familiarity. But how can cases like this be avoided in a classroom that is based on support and freedom? There's still more that needs to be accomplished in a feminist classroom that looks at issues of students' interaction with each others.

Additionally, another student to student interaction I witnessed occurred during a group project when the teacher asked students to get into two groups and she gave a Tinker toy set to each group with the only instruction to build a good structure as best as they could. Since this was a sociological experiment about the unequal distribution of resources, each Tinker toy set had uneven material to work with.

There was nothing said about who builds the best structure, but both groups were defensively working in their assigned corners. Each group had one student standing and taking note of what the other group was doing. The group that had less material was complaining, but there was no suggestion from the group members of borrowing from the other group. The leader of the group with more material, however, said “let’s steal some from the other group.”

The dialogues within groups had “ours,” and “we,” so this suggested that the groups were working in solidarity but the terms used to describe the opponent team showed competition. The teacher did not mention anything about competition but the groups assumed that this work was about who builds the best and the tallest structure. Even the group with less material did not try to work efficiently with what they had; instead they were competing with the “haves.”

When they were done, the teacher finally commented on their separate competitive ways and asked why they did not work together. The answers students gave were like “we thought we were supposed to work in groups;” “you told us to build the best.” This type of competitive nature shows how students have learned to live in their separate, competitive spheres. Just one class on community building and supportive environment will not eradicate their seventeen or more years (as the group encompassed 18-year-old freshmen’s, right out of high school) of competitive, alienated study and work habits.

This observation showed me that students, when left to their own ways, will not attempt to work together, not because they do not want to, but because they do not know that it is okay to work together. The patriarchal method of learning has encouraged separation and competition, therefore, if not elaborately told what and how to approach working together, student will not work together.

### Survey

The second part in my goal of understanding how a classroom works was to do a student survey in the WR 115 class; the entire class of 19 students took part in the survey. The questions were focused on gender, gendered stereotypes, and expectations that students have of a good teacher and a good student. My goal with this survey was to see what students think of when they think of a good teacher and what they think are characteristics of a good student.

Students had to choose in order of importance: 1 being very important and 5 least important. The results from the survey enabled me to understand that students want teachers to be know-it-all because they have learned to look at teachers as givers of knowledge; if however teachers admit that they do not have the answer then they will not take the teacher seriously. The survey, also, helped me understand that students have been conditioned to prefer teachers to deliver knowledge like it's a "to go" pack that they can carry with them as they leave the classroom. The survey asked:

A good teacher is

- strict
- Supportive
- Open-minded
- Welcomes others opinions
- Knowledgeable in the subject area

Out of 19 students, ten picked strict as least important. Four students gave 3 points to strict and one student said strict was very important. Most students felt that knowledgeable in the subject area, welcomes others opinions, and open-minded were far more important than being supportive. Some stated that strict was equally important as open-minded. While few thought each was an equally important characteristic of a good teacher. It was interesting to see the students feel the need for a good teacher to be strict or in some cases strict and open-minded simultaneously. It shows the confused state that college students are placed into because they are accustomed to being the unknowledgeable-students relying on the know-it-all teacher who can only teach by control and authority. They are being presented with the option for liberation, as critical thinkers who can challenge their teachers, and think alongside them where their teachers are taking their opinions and ideas seriously.

Students want to be considered as worthy of opinions and ideas but if for all their lives they have been silenced, college presents them with some teachers who welcome their opinions whole heartedly while some “professors may even act as though personal recognition is important, but they do so in a superficial way. Professors, even those who view themselves as liberal, may think that it’s good for students to speak, only to proceed in a manner that devalues what the students say” (Teaching to Transgress 149). So students not only become confused about what they learned prior to college, their reaction to college and classrooms becomes about silence because they don’t know how the teacher will react to his/her speaking up.

In the case of for women and minorities especially, silencing is what they are accustomed to while growing up, always being told that they have to watch and follow; but when one feminist teacher, all of a sudden, says “instead of following how about you become a leader,” the student gets confused. The students have “been trained to view themselves as not the ones in

authority, not the ones with legitimacy” (Teaching 144). Ron Scapp, during a dialogue with bell hooks, says, “When we try to change the classroom so that there is a sense of mutual responsibility for learning, students get scared that you are now not the captain working with them, but that you are after all just another crew member– and not a reliable one at that” (Teaching 144). Also as Paulo Freire says in *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, “The students might think that you [the teacher] are not rigorous because you asked them to critically read and re-write a single text instead of imposing on them the obligation of reading 300 books in a semester (11). This speaks about the way traditional method of education has confused students into second guessing themselves because they are cultured to be obedient to anyone who seems authoritative. Even the term “teacher” brings to mind the conveyer of knowledge or wisdom. Students want to learn from the teacher, yet the idea of open dialogue with teacher sounds intriguing; but because it is a terrain that they have not navigated before, students appear to not fully grasp how a good teacher should be.

The students expectation of their teacher entailed some hesitant response about the teacher’s need to be strict and open-minded, but the question about a good student was attention grabbing for me because their answers on the surveys said one thing, while my observation said something else. For the question about a good student, the options available for the students were:

A good student

Participates in class discussion

Comes to class prepared

Takes responsibility for actions

Always on time

Open-minded and ready to hear “the other” side

Majority of the students put 1 next to “comes to class prepared.” Next most important were: takes responsibility for action and participates in class discussion. Always on time was assigned 3, 4, and 5. Looking at the trend of what the students mentioned as most important such as participates in discussion, and then looking back at the observation, I find that the two do not match. There were only few who participated during entire class discussions and yet majority of the survey participants said class discussion is important. Coming to class prepared was right on spot because majority of the students always had their readings done and always had their assignments and papers ready to be handed in on due dates but none of the students picked open-mined as 1 or 2. Clearly, it shows that students have been trained to develop a one track mind, to listen and absorbed what the teacher says or just do as the teacher says.

### **Case Studies Analysis**

I interviewed five students, individually, for the case studies in order to listen to the students’ side about their investment in their education, their feelings on class participation, and student-teacher and student-student interaction. Although I must admit that this is a very small sample from the larger student pool at Eastern Oregon University, I particularly focused on the student input from the WR 115 class, in which I was a T.A. and Gender Studies 201, where I was a tutor for the term. I picked 3 students from WR 115: white male- Jake, black male- Andrew, and an Asian female- Kim; from Gender 201 I had a very limited group to pick from since I wanted to work with only the students who I had interaction with on a regular basis when they came for the tutoring session. So I picked two white females who attended the tutoring session regularly: Baila and Cassie. (All the names are fictional to ensure student confidentiality).

The five case studies provide a very thorough insight into how students have been

conditioned to view and react to authority. Interviewees had different things to say about their perception of a teacher, fellow students, and their own identities. It took a little probing into their silent student minds to get answers to several questions. It was difficult to get answers but different ways of asking the same questions provided some very interesting, although sad responses. From childhood each individual is conditioned to believe that authority, power, and control lies in the hands of those that are supposedly acknowledged as superior to others as a result of their social class, race, or gender.

The educational system has ensured that education is about conformity and learning the way of the superiors, not to become superiors themselves, but to maintain the social order that allows the superiors to remain in their box and the inferiors to remain in theirs. Those that attempt to free themselves through education are most of the times made to believe that those in power are the ones who have the right answers for everyone else; males, females, and people of color are conditioned to believe that they have to be in their socially constructed box in order to be acknowledged.

These beliefs are ingrained in people since the time they are born; just like gender determines the type of clothes or toys parents are supposed to buy for their children, color determines whether they will lead or follow. It's not as simple as I make it sound, yet at least it provides some type of idea of what social construction is about; gender, race, and class are complexly interconnected to define how a person is treated in the society. The boundaries created by society are supposed to be dissolved through knowledge but education is one field that instead of breaking down the boundaries it seems to further strengthen them. Educators, who believe in a facilitative form of education, especially feminist pedagogues who acknowledge that people's ideas are shaped by their experiences, need to ensure that classroom is "safe" enough to

where conversations can happen where everyone is heard, not just few most vocal individuals. By everyone I mean women, and people of color.

Although if I asked the interviewees “Are you oppressed?” I am sure they would have said “No” because there is no visible sign of pain, rejection, or even alienation. But looking at each student’s response critically, I find many signs that show how the educational system, as a part of the social power structure, enforces silence and conformity in the oppressed lot.

Being silent means being invisible in a classroom; it shows how women and people of color have been socialized to assume the passive role of accepting what authority says. Showing authority that they have a voice is not something that they have been taught to do while growing up. The Asian female, Kim, for instance, says that she thinks it’s important for the teacher to hear what she has to say but she doesn’t feel the need to speak on every single topic. Similarly the Black male, Andrew says, “I don’t think it’s very important for her to hear what I have to say. It’s more important for me to hear what she has to say;” because he believes that “Class is more about gaining perspective.” He says, “I mean I guess it’s important for other students to hear what I have to say but I don’t think it necessarily important for the teacher to hear what I have to say.” The white female, Cassie, sheds light on the reason why speaking up in class is important for her as she says, “I think it is very important because if you have something to say and you don’t feel like the teacher has heard you say then what you have to say isn’t important. So then you don’t want to speak up because you don’t think you matter or your opinion matters.” However, the white male, Jake, only says, “It’s very important.” The two women and the Black male feel that they have to backup their response with what they deem is an appropriate reason for speaking in class, whereas the White male doesn’t feel the need to say something more than “It’s very important.” This shows that the white male knows that he has to speak and be heard;



there is no question of being invisible. He has to ensure that he matters because as a male and as white he has been socialized to know that it is important for others to hear what he says. Women and people of color, however, have been conditioned to believe that they can “get by” by being silent because decisions will be made whether they speak or not.

Women not necessarily believe that their voice is unimportant, they have been suppressed to behave passively. By saying that “I don’t feel the need to speak on every single topic,” Kim is saying that her ideas on some issues are not as important as on the others. Cassie is in late middle-ages; she has discovered the importance of voicing her ideas and opinions, but her story speaks about how she grew up being often told to be silent or to watch and follow. As for the Asian female, her culture, first of all, encourages passivity in women; where men do the thinking on important issues while women think and speak about private arena. When I asked Kim an example of what she would be passionate about she said, “Sports.” Upon further questioning about talking in class she acknowledged that speaking in class is important but she does not like it. If an emphasis was put on the importance of speaking up then, perhaps, being vocal would not be so much of a problem for her just like Baila and Cassie discovered overtime that they have experiences and they have to voice their opinions and ideas because they have to be participants even if they would rather keep quiet. But being quiet makes people invisible, as Christine Froula, a young feminist critic writes, women’s “voice threatens to discredit the masculinist culture, upon which men have molded their identity” (qtd in Heilbrun 30). This means that if women speak then there is a fear within the patriarchal hierarchy that they will find out and retaliate against the oppression that they have suffered. If women will think, speak, and react to how they have been treated, the fear is that they will turn the tables and make men suffer the same way, a rather ridiculous thought.

Minorities and women are socialized to feel inadequate and uncomfortable with their version of truth, often feeling inferior about their experiences, as if their experiences are a result of their incompetence. In the case of Kim, if she grew up being passionate about sports and other issues were considered unimportant then, clearly, she is conditioned to feel the importance of sports but other ideas were not encouraged. The gist of the conversation focused on Kim's silence. Similarly, Andrew's response shows the type of racism that exists in our society that makes people of color feel that their ideas and opinions are not very important. The black male's comment that "it's not very important for her to hear what I have to say. It's more important for me to hear what she has to say," goes back to the cultural oppression as hooks says, "Students of color and some white women express fear that they will be judged as intellectually inadequate by [their] peers (Teaching 39). This statement rings true as I look through the case studies; all the interviewees expressed some sort of fear, although they did not want to call it fear because calling it fear means they are afraid but by calling it "making a fool of myself," "I don't want to look stupid," or "I want to have a good impression," it speaks about how they have been raised to live up to others expectations, to feel inadequate in front of anyone who has the authority, and to not speak if they do not have the "truth;" truth that is not theirs but the truth of the authorities.

Women and people of color have been conditioned to believe that they do not have the so called "truth;" therefore, when a feminist teacher requires that everyone has to speak, then s/he is doing something that silent students have, perhaps, never been subjected to. As Paulo Freire says, "Caring about whether all students fulfill their responsibility to contribute to learning in the classroom is not a common approach in the 'banking system of education' where students are regarded merely as passive consumers" (Teaching 40). One way to overcome silence in a diverse classroom is to explain "Philosophy, strategy, and intent" clearly (Teaching 42). It also means

teaching about teaching, that is, about shifting paradigm and talking about discomfort, as well as acknowledging pain (Teaching 43). This means that teachers teaching in diverse classrooms should acknowledge the diversity and ensure that all students are included in anything that happens in classrooms.

Teachers will have to ensure that students who are not comfortable with speaking certainly speak, and for students who are vocal to make space for least vocal students. Maybe the teacher will have to get the requirements for the class in writing in order to show her/his efforts to create a classroom community where each student can come to voice. If teachers do not let students know that they (teachers) are also learners then students will feel uncomfortable in the class, they will assume the barriers created by the traditional student-teacher power differential that is so common in educational institutions.

A good example of this power differential is illustrated in my conversation with Kim who made a comment that it's easier for her to open up to a group of peers than to her professor. When I asked why, she said, "Just because they have had more schooling than me, and my classmates, most of them are freshman, first year students so I feel less inferior to them because we are all at the same level. With the professors I feel there is a gap." Or like Jake, who said that when a teacher makes him speak and he is not prepared he makes it a long, vague sentence, that they end up not getting; and so to keep the teacher happy he speaks but is not saying what the teacher is looking for. Or perhaps, like Baila mentioned that her female lab partner, who got ridiculed by a teacher, may not feel comfortable talking because the teacher may just brush it off as an invalid idea/ opinion. Female pedagogues, in particular, have to make a good faith effort to ensure that their classrooms are not necessarily warm and nurturing, but supportive. Students should know that their teacher is investing his/her time in and outside of classroom to his/her

students' success. Students should know that they are able to come to voice and engage in cognitive learning, and in order to maintain a supportive, professional relationship with their students teachers will have to be able to openly dialogue about their expectations.

Undoubtedly, dialogue is the most important part of any form of understanding, which the "banking concept of education," that is, lecturing does not use. The traditional mode of learning tries to have a one way system of the delivery of knowledge and in this form the deliverance of knowledge establishes that the teacher, who although educated, is rigidly holding on to what s/he is taught, and delivering that to the students in a classroom. Transformative education and feminist pedagogy, in particular, acknowledges that knowledge is fluid, it is complex, and that it can not happen in isolation. Feminist teachers acknowledge that knowledge is about coming together as a community without barriers of race, class, and gender, to learn; however it's easier said then done. Therefore, attempts have to be made in experimenting how to successfully engage students in a classroom that not only addresses oppression and its complexity but involve students in dialogues on how to overcome them.

Although everyone must have suffered some sort of subjugation in their lives, women and minorities have suffered oppression most frequently, and it is not okay to just describe these incidents in a transformative environment. Although it is difficult to talk about these issues, students have to question themselves why it is difficult to talk about issues of oppression. In the WR115 classroom, for instance, the class was required to write an essay about a topic that they felt related to their experiences. None of the students- even those of color- picked issues of racism. Maybe there is a fear that they may say something wrong that may offend someone else; but if they are unable to speak about it then how will they understand how racism exists? If they do not dialogue about it then how will they attempt to eradicate it?

Another issue of oppression I am particularly interested in is women in higher education, which I was able to investigate more with Cassie, the late-middle-age female expresses her own transformation from a passive receptor role to the active participant. The way she speaks about it shows that it is not something that she is doing comfortably as a normal act. It takes effort to change from a passive student to an active one. It is a daily struggle because she has to assess who her audience is and whether she will be heard. This indicates the role of patriarchy in undermining women to fulfill the mother, nurturer role. Also important to acknowledge is that this female, who finally understands her role as an active participant, is a non-traditional student with two adult sons. Her main duty as defined by the patriarchal system— procreation— is now complete, through schooling and finding teachers who gave her a supportive space she was able to discover her voice, this in itself speaks about education as a practice of freedom and self-discovery.

Even though Kim is much younger in age, both women, Kim and Cassie, opt for silence in most situations. Baila prefers being a listener, if she has a choice. The fear of being wrong or ridiculed was mainly the reason for Kim and Cassie to not speak up. While the males, Jake and Andrew, talked about speaking and making an impression, or having a perspective, the females Baila and Cassie talked about speaking as an investment in their self worth and voice as an important step in acknowledging self-confidence. As Baila said “I have been faced with oppression, and I do have these experiences that I can share my opinions on,” and Cassie said that if she is confident in what she has to say, and when she speaks first, it makes her feel good. She said “It makes me feel like hey, I know what I am talking about; I get this; I understand this, and I have something to say.” Women see a connection between speaking and self-confidence, while men are concerned about a good impression on others.

While the female students are focused on education as empowerment, men see it as an act of power. For instance Jake acknowledges his attempt to answer in a long vague sentence fulfilling the requirement of the teacher yet, not answering the way it is supposed to be; Cassie says that although she will find it hard to do so, she will try her best and give her opinion. The male interviewee's level of confidence is far greater than female interviewees. Again, this goes back to how each is raised and acknowledged while growing up.

Another example of gender difference I saw was in the Andrew's statement that listening to others was about "using other people's opinions to help his ideas." He confidently acknowledged that being a listener is not a fear of being wrong, instead it is a tool to come up with one's own answer; the female in Cassie, however, acknowledged that she admires people who can speak up. She said that it's a skill that they have learned and she has not.

Surely, even the way both genders answer the questions states how men and women have been molded to maintain the status quo in society where men and women live in their separate spheres. Age differences really did not make much difference in both genders reaction to the questions. While males claim their silence in classroom is a strategy for success, women state the fear of being wrong or ridiculed.

### **Recommendations**

It is easier for a teacher to not dig deeper into issues of oppression and just impart his/her interpretation of the text, or even assume that the discussion of the text is a good practice to build students' social and intellectual skills. Feminist pedagogy presents teachers with a situation where just talking is not enough; if cognitive learning is not taking place then students are not gaining anything. Feminist pedagogy requires teachers, who practice such form of teaching as well as those who are considering this approach, to understand that lesson plans are good tools

but they are methods used by the traditional form of teaching that is designed as a one-plan-fits-all idea. Each student who comes into the class brings his/her life experiences and interpretive styles, therefore teachers should ensure that what they are teaching takes into account all students.

Teachers will have to ensure that each student, whether the most vocal or the most silent, speaks in the class. If it's a male student who speaks a lot then he should be encouraged to support the women students by giving them space and time to speak up. As Ira Shor says, "I've observed in my classes that men interrupt women when women are speaking, but women don't interrupt the men...some women insist on their right to finish, but most have been socialized into deferring to a man when he starts talking, even if he interrupts them" (Shor 164). Women have been conditioned to be the supporters of men's accomplishments and this shows up during classroom conversations. As my observation in classroom showed, women look up to the vocal men, waiting for the men to give their interpretation on issues. Not that they believe the interpretations per se, but perhaps the belief is that they will have something to say that will enlighten everybody.

The teacher in this case should ensure that everybody gets equal floor time to state their ideas and opinions, and ensure that there is some way, in which the class can jointly decide about making sure that no one is interrupted. One way to do this is by stating that only one person talks at any given time. If it is a very vocal class, then raising their hands to speak will seem like a good solution. If the class is quieter, however, then maybe the teacher should start at one end and listen to each student's perspective.

Shor highlights another important issue common with sexism in classroom— women's low voice. He says that "The woman's voice often starts out in a tone that does not command

the same attention as a man's voice" (164). He adds that

I notice this as a political problem of discourse and then draw out female voices for an equal pressure in discussion. Women have less opportunity to exercise critical voices in the public, so I do some compensating in the classroom by asking the women to extend their remarks when they speak. I'll sustain eye contact a little longer and show no impatience to have them stop in favor of my response. I stop the men from prematurely ending the women's remarks, but I also try to beat the men into the conversation when the woman finishes to invite her to say more (164).

By allowing women extra time to speak, Shor ensures that they do a little more than just stop at "Yes" or "No"; instead of just blurting a few word sentences to ensure that they have filled the requirement to speak, he encourages women to state what they mean. Just like my interview with female students required that I ask one question in many different ways in order to get more than a nod or a head shake. Similarly, teachers will have to ask each question in several different ways so that they can get the female students to speak up. As far as the tone of voice is concerned, if teachers ensure that only one person speaks at a time then the softest speaker can be heard, or the teacher can, casually, request the student to speak a little louder because the students at the back or front (depending on where the speaking student is sitting) may not be able to hear very well.

In order to make the classroom woman friendly, Mara H. Wasburn, author of *Is Your Classroom Woman-Friendly?*, suggests several strategies to ensure that women students have positive experiences in classrooms. Firstly she suggests, "When you ask a question, do not call on the first person whose hand goes up. Ask students to think for a few minutes before raising their hands. Women generally are more concerned about calling out wrong answers than are



men, so their hands often are not among the first up. Waiting a few minutes may result in more women being willing to answer questions (Sadker and Sadker qtd in Wasburn). While leading a my first class discussion on racism and racial stereotypes, I made sure that I gave enough time for students to come up with answers, and I made sure that they had my undivided attention while they spoke so that they could speak more than just one word. I also noticed that women students did not raise their hands, instead they looked at me, and this look is something that I have been quite familiar with in my student career. When I had an answer but I was not sure if I could take the risk to speak up on my own, I used to look at the teacher hoping that I was called upon. Therefore I tried the same technique and I did in fact get some very good answers from the female students who would not have spoken otherwise.

Secondly, Wasburn suggests, “Relate material to the real world– how what they learn can be applied to help people. Women generally are more interested in learning the material if it is tied to how what they are learning can help the world; they would rather build a chair that can help a disabled person than build a chair for the sake of building a better chair (AAUW 2000, National Council for Research on Women 2001 qtd in Wasburn). Along with this idea, if the teacher makes it personal by using him/herself as an example relating, or sharing his/her experiences, it allows the female students to see how the inside world of the classroom is related to the outside world.

Additionally she suggests, “If you have students working in teams and there are few women in your class, consider assigning the teams yourself, rather than letting the students do it. When there are few women in a class, they often are the last to be chosen.” This ensures that women are equally divided into teams instead of having one all women’s group or five men and two women for example. If there are majority men than they don’t allow women to speak up or

women feel that they may not have anything good to say; just like referring back to my classroom observation when the only female student in the group with four males said, my paper is bad, I am not going to read it.” None of the male students encouraged her to read; in fact they were glad that the group session was over quickly.

This type of behavior can be discouraged if students in groups are given points for listening and providing feedback to each other. Each student will be required to evaluate the group members’ and the students will have something in it for themselves. If it takes giving extra points for group work just to ensure that all students participate then I think that it is a reasonable idea that teachers should use.

Along with sexism, Shor sheds light on racism and ways to avoid it in classrooms. He says

The non-white minority in my college is usually silent in the classroom, outnumbered by white peers, in an area with a reputation for tense race relations. So I make special efforts to encourage non-whites, to enter the dialogue and to extend their remarks as well as addressing race issues and racist remarks when they surface in class. I also bring in stories and articles on this theme. In general, it has been harder for non-whites to exercise their voice in my college than it has been for women (164- 165).

Racism being a touchy topic, people including teachers do not want to involve in discussions that require critical consciousness about pain and oppression, but to ignore it is to be ignorant about its existence, and thus become a participant in creating oppression. Additionally, as bell hooks says,

What does it mean when a white female English professor is eager to include a work by Toni Morrison on the syllabus of her course but then teaches that work without even

making reference to race or ethnicity? I have heard individual white women “boast” about how they have shown students that black writers are “as good” as the white male cannon when they do not call attention to race...The unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained (Teaching 39).

Hooks says that subjects the students are passionate about will always mean that there is a possibility of “confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict” (Teaching 39). If teachers try to avoid this they will be following the traditional form of teaching where students will only respond when they are asked a question. Hooks says that “The experience of professors who educate for critical consciousness indicates that many students, especially students of color, may not feel at all ‘safe’ in what appears to be a neutral setting. It is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or lack of student engagement” (39). Just like the Black, male student in my interview, said it’s not important for the teacher to hear what he has to say it’s more important for him to hear the teacher; in order to engage minority students, teachers will have to ensure that the silent students get an opportunity to speak.

## **Conclusion**

This project allowed me to explore feminist pedagogy at work in the classroom at Eastern Oregon University. Specifically, I was a teacher assistant in a Writing 115 class. My goal was to understand the term “Feminist Pedagogy;” explore the benefits and risks involved with this form of teaching. I wanted to: explore the students’ expectations of their teachers and their own expectations of good students; listen to what and how the students want to learn versus what the teacher wants to teach; and observe how matters of gender and race are addressed in a feminist classroom.

This project made me realize how little I know about teaching and the art of feminist pedagogy. The scope of this project was very small, but big enough for me to get my feet wet, so to speak. I realize that a lot more work needs to be done to create greater awareness about the practice of feminist pedagogy and confronting oppression, especially now that United States is a melting pot of various races, and sexualities.

This project helped me discover two very famous intellectuals in the field of pedagogy and education as a practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and Ira Shor. Their work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, consecutively, gave me a very meaningful and deep understanding about transformative method of teaching and learning. Amongst other authors, bell hooks outshines in my work because I have studied her throughout my gender studies course work, and her method of teaching defines how education should be a tool for liberation.

Not only have I learned from hooks, I have become aware of the struggle that I went through my college career thinking that this is how teaching is supposed to be— all-knowing teacher presenting great ideas to empty-brained students. I have learned the importance of dialogue and the teacher’s responsibly to ensure that knowledge is constructed jointly. This

project enabled me to find my own interest in transformative teaching and higher education, as a student oriented, student organized, and student dominated teaching.

However, I also understand that more work needs to be done to show the importance of cognitive learning in colleges and universities across the United States, so that even the least vocal student can find his/her voice and strength to confidently confront and deal with oppression , as well as to take control of his/her own learning.

## **Appendix A**

### **Case Study One- Kim**

#### **How important is it for you that your teacher hears what you have to say in the classroom?**

“It’s important to me but I don’t feel the need to speak out on every single topic. If I have something to say, I would like them to listen to what I have to say but I don’t expect them to call on me every time if they are not asking for comments.”

#### **Would you rather speak or listen to what others have to say?**

“Depends on what we are talking about; like if I am passionate about a topic e.g. sports.”

Student said if she was knowledgeable about the topic and some one was going on and on with incorrect information, then she would want to speak up and correct them.

#### **What are your experiences in group discussions with fellow students?**

“So far I felt pretty comfortable. May be if we had an assigned reading and I didn’t get it done then I’d feel left out because everyone else would be talking about it and I had no idea what was going on.”

#### **Do you think group discussions are good practice? Why/ Why not**

“I prefer probably the group talks. It takes pressure off of you to get involved. It’s easier for me to open up to a group of my peers than my professor. It’s easier to get more out of it.

#### **Why would you feel pressure from the Professor?**

“Just because they’ve had more schooling than me, and my classmates, most of them are freshman, first year students so I feel less inferior to them because we are all at the same level. With the professors I feel there is a gap.”

#### **If the teacher called on you to give an answer even if you didn’t raise your hand, how comfortable would you be to answer?**

“Most of the time I probably try and think it in my head and then say it – thinking in the head so that I don’t make a fool of myself– I don’t really like it when teachers do that but it would be a good practice to do it in class. I can see how it would be useful, but I don’t like it.”

**If a teacher made everybody speak in class instead of only asking only those students who raise their hands, do you think the teacher is right in doing so?**

“I think it’s fair because it’s their classroom and they can run it how they want to, and if they want to try and get everyone involved, I think it’s fair.

**So when you go in a classroom you believe the teacher has more power and if you don’t “behave right” then your grade can be affected?**

I think it has to be that way because otherwise students would just...if they didn’t have someone teaching them then students just wouldn’t learn anything. It would probably get out of control.”

**Do you feel comfortable being the first person to respond to a teacher’s question when nobody around you is raising his/her hand? Why/ Why Not?**

“It would take probably a little while, I would just be unsure on one else knows it then I start second guessing myself.”

**How do you feel group work adds to your interaction with fellow students?**

“It has been good. Helps you see other people’s point of views like how they interpret things. Also, it helps you get to know your classmates better because you don’t always just talk to them. For me, most of the people I go to class with, I don’t talk to out of class. And I probably wouldn’t talk to them in class if we didn’t have group discussions.”

**If there were no group works, do you think you would feel that you would get to know more of you classmates? Why/ Why Not?**

“No”

**Would you rather a teacher lecture for the entire class time and you take notes, or the teacher give some text related information and involved the entire class in discussion about the text? Explain your answer.**

“I would prefer the text related information and involving the class in discussion, because when you are just lectured to for an hour at a time, you just get, for me anyway, it’s hard to pay attention or stay focused on what they are saying. It’s hard to remember. You’re trying to remember all that information. Usually what they lecture on is what they’ll base the midterm questions on. So even if you know it’s wrong, you still have to learn what the teacher says.”

Case Study Two- Jake

**How important is it for you that your teacher hears what you have to say in the classroom?**

“It’s very important.”

**Would you rather speak or listen to what others have to say?**

“As for me, I like to listen. Sometimes I will speak if it comes to me first. I like to listen to other peoples input and what they have to say about questions.”

**So if you are in a class and you have something to say do you prefer to be the first one or you want to listen and see how the class responds?**

“I guess you can say that; I like to listen to what other people have to say and probably, maybe give me ideas off of what they say. If I have an answer, I will still do that but if no one else raises his/her hand then I will definitely raise my hand.”



**Why do you want to listen to what others have to say before you speak?**

“I don’t know, I guess it’s their own interpretation, something that I missed maybe.”

**So you are afraid of making a fool of yourself?**

“Well just a little bit but not really. Because I am a freshman in a new school I guess I don’t really care. Actually, I, kind of, do care. I want to make a good impression on people that I am not stupid or anything. Sometimes not saying anything can make you look stupid or make a fool of yourself.”

**What are your experiences in group discussions with fellow students?**

“Depends on my mood. There’s usually one person that usually is the talker, is always talkative and everyone else in the group expects him/her to talk more, and so they won’t say much.”

**So how comfortable are you in raising your voice if there is another person who talks a lot?**

“If I am in a happy mood, of course I am going to talk. Depends on what my attitude is towards the subject.”

**Do you think group discussions are good practice? Why/ Why not**

“They are 50/50. Some of the group discussions...some people are not participating and they are just blowing it off. But group discussion is good because you get other people input on the subject.”

**Does it put more responsibility on the ones who are in fact participating? Have you been the “other” person?**

“I think I have been both.”

**What do you think the teacher should do?**

“If I were a teacher, I’d break it up in small groups and the smaller the groups the lesser the people, you are going to have more input in small groups. Even though there will be a lot of groups there will be a lot of little groups and they are all going to talk. Some people are afraid to talk in big groups. If you have little groups, they can at least have some input.”

**If the teacher called on you to give an answer even if you didn’t raise your hand, how comfortable would you be to answer?**

“Probably not very comfortable because the reason why I didn’t raise my hand is because I didn’t know it, or may be I did know and I was looking to others. A lot of it does depend on...previously people thought I was a football player so of course I am not going to know anything...they laughed because I actually I answered a question sometimes. Classrooms here at college level are way different; I feel more comfortable here.”

**If teacher called on you, but s/he gives student the opportunity to pass if they feel that they do not have the answer, what do you think of those moments when the teacher wants everybody to speak?**

“Oh my gosh, a lot of the times when the teacher calls on me unexpectedly, I laugh because I don’t really know the answer, or sometimes I just say I don’t know. I just try to be honest. A lot of the times I try to say something.”

**If college is going to be a practice of what the real world is like and in the real world, when you graduate, nobody is there to say whether you are wrong or not; you have to stand on your own and support yourself, and make a statement about yourself to compete with others who have graduated with the same degree as you. If college is going to prepare you, if classroom is going to prepare you for the world outside the classroom, do you think it should be okay to make a mistake and not care about what others are going to say or that you will be laughed at?**

“It’s a good question” (laughter) (silence)...ummm....(silence). I don’t know.”

**Let me ask you another question then. When a teacher asks you something and you “feel” other students, when you are “feeling” other students then do you have an answer in your mind?**

A lot of times I get the idea and then I raise my hand and I try to make it a long sentence (vague), they just end up not getting it and it’s like answering a question but not answering it.”

**If a teacher made everybody speak in class instead of only asking only those students who raise their hands, do you think the teacher is right in doing so?**

“I would expect at this level, yes. Because you are expected to, but in high school when teacher would do that your peers will make joke of you.”

**But if the teacher calls on you and you don’t have answer then?**

“Then that’s probably not right. I don’t know. It depends on her part, I mean not her....the teacher...umm if the teacher feels confident enough that everyone should know this, that everyone has been paying attention, then yes. If he spends a lot of time on it then usually the students will know. If you just teach something in a day and the next day you ask

everyone what it was, the right definition and how it's used and everything, I don't think that's right."

**Do you feel comfortable being the first person to respond to a teacher's question when nobody around you is raising his/her hand? Why/ Why Not?**

**(Skipped)**

**How do you feel group work adds to your interaction with fellow students?**

"Personally, I do like group work better because a lot of the times when you are working on something by yourself you usually hit a slump and you don't have anyone...Its great because you get to work as a team, to work with different people and their different backgrounds and you could see how they work, or how intelligent they can be, I guess."

**If there were no group works, do you think you would feel that you would get to know more of you classmates? Why/ Why Not?**

"No, because some people are shy and they don't usually go out and meet new people. If you have group work, you get to know people you thought you would never get to meet before.

**When you think of group work, what do you think is the opposite of that? One on one with the teacher or the group of students listening to the teacher?**

"Basically the teacher is there and it's one on one with yourself. It's just yourself and you are, say, more individualized, you can be probably more selfish and self-centered."

**Would you rather a teacher lecture for the entire class time and you take notes, or the teacher give some text related information and involved the entire class in discussion about the text? Explain your answer.**

“Text and discussion is my ideal way of learning better. With lectures I get bored easily. My experience with lectures was it was really long, it was hard to concentrate but what really helped was that it was dark so it was easier to relax your eyes a little bit.”

**What do you see as benefits of lecturing?**

“Visual and auditory learning. You have a huge crowd facing one person.”

**Discussion based?**

Everyone’s involved

**Do you feel comfortable with the teacher as opposed to a lecturer?**

“Yeah.”

**Why?**

I guess in a discussion class, a teacher is talking to me and in a lecture class teacher is talking to 300 people. I just feel like he is performing, like acting (laughs). Lecture class is all about what he knows and all of his knowledge but with a discussion the teacher can learn something from other students that may know something that he doesn’t.”

Case Study Three- Baila

**How important is it for you that your teacher hears what you have to say in the classroom?**

“It depends on what type of a class it is. Just looking at the different classes I am taking right now: gender studies, math, and chemistry. Chem. and math are in one corner and gender studies in one corner. It’s not really as important in the chem. and math class; that’s more a type of class where you are going to have a lecture because it’s the type of material they’re teaching and it’s the most effective way to get out a bunch of information and you have to regurgitate when you take the test, whereas the type of class that Gender Studies is, it’s supposed to be interactive, you are

supposed to be thinking and exploring ideas that you have about the world in general. So in my gender studies class I feel that it is important to feel comfortable with talking about things and to share my opinions because that's part of the learning process in that type of class and I don't really care in chem. and math."

**Don't you think would there be any other way of teaching chem. and math classes?**

"Actually I was thinking about that lately because we kind of brought this up earlier.

Honestly in my math and chem. Classes, I can see that they are trying to incorporate more things like that, just to make it more interesting especially my chem. professor, he was explaining quantum theory and chem. today and relating it to the world. Like he would tell little stories about how microwaves work. That's not going to be on the test but he is making it interesting so that we can grasp it a little better.

I was taking ancient history once, most boring class I ever took. All he did was write out the overheads and put them up and read. We were supposed to copy down exactly what he said and that's what the tests were. It was horrible. At least, I think that there's been enough research recently to where teachers are trying to get away from that and appeal to all different learning styles instead of just consequential."

**Would you rather speak or listen to what others have to say?**

"Can I say both? If I had to choose, I am a listener first, so I'd rather listen but interacting is something I really really enjoy about class. It's important for me to speak when I have an opinion. In chem. and math, students do not get a chance to really share what they have to say."

**What are your experiences in group discussions with fellow students?**

"Yes."

**Do you have chem. group discussions?**

“Not formally. I help my lab partner study in my free time and it helps me just as much as it helps her. I’ve invited other students so I think that it’s important to do that but its just not focused on during class.”

**Do you think group discussions are good practice? Why/ Why not**

“It helps when you have somebody who doesn’t necessarily agree with the same thing that you think then it either reinforces your ideas or helps you think about it in a different way, so more people that are involved the more diversity you are going to have in opinions, so it really opens your mind.

**If the teacher called on you to give an answer even if you didn’t raise your hand, how comfortable would you be to answer?**

“I really don’t have a problem with sharing my opinion, or if I don’t know the answer to something, or I don’t know how I feel about something then I don’t have a problem with that. I am not embarrassed to say I don’t know.”

**If a teacher made everybody speak in class instead of only asking only those students who raise their hands, do you think the teacher is right in doing so?**

“I haven’t really put myself in a place to think that if I were a professor then would I be hesitant to do something like that. I can see why some teachers are because I know some students get really embarrassed easily but I don’t know how I would feel.”

**As a student of a teacher?**

“I am trying to think from a teacher’s perspective. Like I said before, I don’t care if I am called upon.”

**Do you feel comfortable being the first person to respond to a teacher's question when nobody around you is raising his/her hand? Why/ Why Not?**

“Yes.”

**Then, if you are a talker, like you said if you are talking you have a guilty feeling, maybe, that you are taking over the class. What do you do in those situations? Do you let the guilt taker over or you talk...because I have seen people say “sorry I have to say this,” they apologize. They are the talkers, they know they are talking a lot; they apologize for being “loud.”**

“You know I was worried about that when I first started this class, because I said things to some of the other students and somebody said something like “Oh what sort of intelligent thing are you going to say in class today? So I thought I should give some other students a chance.”

**How do you feel group work adds to your interaction with fellow students?**

“It branches me out. Even though it is easy for me to walk up and talk to people it's hard for me to actually try to go and make connection with people, so now when I interact with other students it forces me in having a deeper discussion with someone that I probably wouldn't have instead of just talking about random things.

**If there were no group works, do you think you would feel that you would get to know more of you classmates? Why/ Why Not? (Like in your chem. class if you don't have group discussions how well do you know the students there compared to gender studies?)**

“I sit in the back of the classroom in every single one of my classes, and honestly I know the people that sit around me kind of. But I don't go to the other side of the room, to talk to anyone else. Especially since my chem. class is so huge, it's like 100 people. I know there are a few



people who sit in front of me and one person who sits behind me and those are the only people I've interacted with in class, other than the professor.

**Would you rather a teacher lecture for the entire class time and you take notes, or the teacher give some text related information and involved the entire class in discussion about the text? Explain your answer.**

B . That's why I am saying I like my gender studies class, the way that it goes a lot better than just in the chem. and math classes. I am sure there are some sort of creative ways that you can teach a math or a science class like that. When you take something that's so ingrained in the way that its supposed to be and try to change it then a lot of people are going to oppose that like students that may be freshman and sophomore and once their junior year hits they have to do an adjustment like that, that's going to be huge, its going to be difficult. Maybe they don't like it as much because maybe they like the lecture mode.

*Side note:*

**When you think about education system after high school you come to college, college is supposed to be a time you are thinking and relating things to your own life and the larger world. Why are these people like Einstein different? Did they go out of the norm? Why are they remembered? Their ideas were captured and nothing has changed since then. I mean how they got their ideas. The ideas they are famous for were certainly not taught to them. They were discovered.**

“It wasn't taught to them. It was certainly something that they...I understand what you are going for now. I understand. Einstein was famous because he came up with something that nobody had thought of at the time and in order to promote that sort of thinking and that sort of ability and just even realizing that it's a possibility you need to practice it just like anything else. I think that's

exercised a lot more in a class like gender studies as opposed to chem. and math. When you are just having someone stand up in front of you and lecture you, I can understand that. Like I said it's kind of funny that you mentioned Einstein because he was not a good student. Yeah ummm...with math and science, maybe it's just because its been so ingrained in me that it has to be taught in a certain way and it has to be spoon-fed and regurgitated that there's no other way to do it that its hard for me to even imagine it being taught in a more creative and interactive way because, I mean, what could a student like me,... every new chapter now I am learning... everything is brand new to me... I think that there's nothing that I can take in there to share with the professor whereas I feel like I would have opinions in a class like my gender studies because I have been faced with oppression, and I do have these experiences that I can share my opinions on.

**If somebody says “Oh that person is a good teacher,” What are the things that come to your mind? Even a good teacher can sometimes be a bad teacher. Even a good teacher has to make some decisions and how can a good teacher or any teacher know what is good for ...whatever the teacher is going to teach is from his/her perspective and how is that related to what the student wants to know? I guess what I am trying to say is that there are some negatives in the feminist pedagogy because the attempt is to teach in a dichotomous, patriarchal institution. The teachers who are teaching this are doing it in a way that this also reaffirms some of the patriarchal values, I think. What feminist teachers are trying to do is empower but may be sometimes their idea of empowerment may not be what is right for the students.**

“There’s no way that a teacher can know what best for each and every single student that they have no matter how few. Unless that student goes up to them and says this is how I learn best and this is what I want to do, which most students are not that assertive. So I mean I have noticed in class there are few people that never say anything, actually there are quite a few number of people. I guess maybe it’s just an indication of the patriarchal system because they are probably not used to it. The way that they have learned their entire lives they’ve been conditioned to just sit there; they feel uncomfortable if they are called upon. Like my lab partner was telling me she got ridiculed one time because she asked a question about something and the teacher flipped and said that it was a stupid question, which really really angers me because, you know, you are there to teach the student so if the student has a question you are supposed to be able to answer it and you are not supposed to criticize. That’s a worse thing a teacher could do is to criticize a student for asking a question when their job is to answer their questions and to teach them. So, of course, after that she’s going to feel like well I don’t want to ask questions anymore. I don’t want to understand if it’s going to mean that I am going to be ridiculed then why would I ask any question?”

Case Study Four- Andrew

**How important is it for you that your teacher hears what you have to say in the classroom?**

“I don’t think it’s very important for her to hear what I have to say. It’s more important for me to hear what she has to say.”

**Why?**

“Because, I think class is more about gaining perspective. I mean I guess it’s important other students to hear what I have to say but I don’t think it’s necessarily important for the teacher to hear what I have to say.”

**Would you rather speak or listen to what others have to say?**

“I’d rather listen.”

**Don’t you think your insight would be important for other students to hear?**

“Yes, but I am willing to give my opinion on things but I rather listen.”

**What are your experiences in group discussions with fellow students?**

“Good experiences. There really seems to be someone that dominates the conversation but there seems that everybody gets their two cents in, so to speak.”

**Do you feel comfortable in group discussions or do you feel alienated?**

“I feel comfortable.”

**Do you think group discussions are good practice? Why/ Why not**

“Yes.”

**When you think of group discussions what do you think is the opposite of that.**

**What comes to mind?**

“I don’t know.”

**The teacher talking and you all listening?**

“Yes, I guess so.”

**When you compare it with group discussion, what would you rather have?**

“I’d rather have a group discussion, personally.”

**Why?**

“I think that its important to hear what students have to say not just the teacher.”

**If the teacher called on you to give an answer even if you didn't raise your hand, how comfortable would you be to answer?**

“It depends on how well I know the material at the time, but most of the time I feel pretty comfortable.”

**Some teachers give students the opportunity to say something or pass. Would you rather say something or pass?**

“I'd rather say something.”

**Why do you think that's important?**

“Because I think when I give an opinion, even if it's a wrong opinion may be someone else had the same wrong opinion about something or a wrong idea.”

**When you are sitting in a class, a teacher is asking something , do you want to listen first to what others have to say , or can you be the first one to answer, or second or third for that matter?**

“I can be the first one to answer but I usually like to listen first.”

**Why? Is there a fear?**

“It's not really a fear; I just like to hear what other people have to say.”

**When you are listening to other people and you have an answer, are you trying to ...what's going on ...are you second guessing yourself or you want to know that you are on the right track and if they are going to answer in a similar way... or you have a totally different thing to say would you say it then or not?**

“Yeah, I guess it will be like making sure that I am on the right track and making sure my answer wasn't too off topic. I like to listen to others and polish it in my head, maybe change it a little bit.”

**Why? What's going on when you are trying to do all these things? Is it that you are trying to have an impression on other students or you are afraid you will be wrong or mocked? Please explain.**

“No it's just that I like to be right. I'd make sure that it's the right information that I am giving even if it's just for other students.

**Just imagine you are wrong. If classrooms are designed to make leaders for tomorrow, if classrooms are supposed to prepare you for the real world where nobody's going to tell you what's right or wrong. Do you think its okay to make a mistake here and be corrected?**

“Yeah, it's not really a fear of being wrong. For me, its more using tools which is when you are in the real world you'll use other tools to make sure that you are right when you do answer or you have a presentation. So it's using other people's opinions to help your ideas. I don't think it's really a fear of being wrong, its just trying kind of making sure that you are right but also I think that it helps not to be afraid to be wrong and answer first.

**If a teacher made everybody speak in class instead of only asking only those students who raise their hands, do you think the teacher is right in doing so?**

“Yes.”

**Why?**

“To make sure that everybody knows the material that's being taught. I don't think there's anything wrong with that it's just helping people with their social skills and trying to pull them out of their shells.”

**Do you feel comfortable being the first person to respond to a teacher's question when nobody around you is raising his/her hand? Why/ Why Not?**

"I am fine with it. I just usually don't do it."

**I want to know more.**

"Usually it goes from class to class. Classes I feel more comfortable in.

**What kind of classes would that be, the ones which you are comfortable in?**

"Not math classes. I think I am better at sociology type."

**How do you feel group work adds to your interaction with fellow students?**

"It adds a lot. It's just social skills basically. A group discussion is all about gaining perspective. Even if it's different from your own, you don't agree with it, it still helps."

**If there were no group works, do you think you would feel that you would get to know more of you classmates? Why/ Why Not?**

"It would be harder to meet people, just to talk with them without group discussion. Because even when you are talking about things in classes it's easier to just talk to them after classes and get to know them."

**Would you rather a teacher lecture for the entire class time and you take notes, or the teacher give some text related information and involved the entire class in discussion about the text? Explain your answer.**

I would rather have the discussion.

**Why?**

"Because I think that it would help to get everybody's opinion on the text, instead of just getting the teacher's opinion."

Case Study Five- Cassie

**How important is it for you that your teacher hears what you have to say in the classroom?**

“I think it’s very important because if you have something to say and you don’t feel like the teacher has heard you say then what you have to say isn’t important. So then you don’t want to speak up because you don’t think you matter or your opinion matters.”

**Have you been like this or was it a transformation on your part?**

I would say I have been like this but I am not normally one to speak up; it’s hard for me to speak up because I was taught as a child to basically keep my mouth shut and even after I grew up I learned the same thing because a lot of the times I put my foot in my mouth, so to speak, I said something that embarrassed me or I felt that I was wrong or someone told me I was wrong, so I just learned to keep my mouth shut.

**Would you rather speak or listen to what others have to say?**

“Usually, I’d rather listen.”

**Why?**

“Because I am not comfortable speaking up.”

**Why are you not comfortable speaking up?**

“Because I am afraid that someone is going to tell me that my opinion is wrong.”

**And who is this someone: some student in class or a teacher?**

“It could be anybody. I think it goes back to what I was taught and what I learned as I was growing up and becoming an adult and experiences I’ve had with speaking up.”

**So when you have something to say in other classes, I know you are comfortable in gender studies, do you repeat it in your mind over and over before you say it?**



“Yeah.”

**What’s the process like when you are thinking it over and over? Is it to see if it flows smooth?**

“Its to make sure that it comes out right because a lot of times what I have experienced is when I am trying to get a point across either I am not getting it across “correctly” or they are just not understanding me.”

**Or maybe they are trying not to understand you?**

“Yeah, I think about that too. Because first of all, I guess, I do think that they are not listening to me that’s why they don’t understand what I am trying to tell them. So that’s why I am not sure if that’s the case: just not listening or if I am not good at getting my point across.”

**What are your experiences in group discussions with fellow students?**

“I think I am a little more comfortable in group discussions although I am still more of a listener instead of someone who speaks up. And if I feel like I am knowledgeable enough about the discussion then I am okay. If I am not quite sure then I just listen”

**What would be the examples of this that you will be knowledgeable about? Does it here to do with life experiences?**

“Its more life experience but just because I am knowledgeable about life experiences doesn’t mean that what I would be giving my opinion about could necessarily be true because I have to have something to back it up, so I have learned.

**Being a listener, you are absorbing everybody else information. There are some people who talk a lot in classes; go off on random topics. Do you think being a listener that is a good thing to do in this situation?**

“I don’t know if it’s a good thing to do or not but I admire someone that can speak up but then again, now I am discovering that sometimes even though it seems like that person that is strong enough to speak up or willing to speak up isn’t necessarily as knowledgeable about what they are taking about even though they seem like they are . Maybe it’s a skill they’ve learned and I haven’t.”

**Do you think group discussions are good practice? Why/ Why not**

I think they are good practice because, at least for me...you feel a little more comfortable within a group of two or three people than you would within your whole classroom, which is maybe 15-20 people. It makes you start to get comfortable with speaking up.

**What if it was a large group discussion? Say a class of 15- 20 divided into two groups?**

“That’s a little harder.”

**Is it the size that matters?**

“Yeah, for me anyway; if you have someone in a group that’s always the one that talks kind of like the center of attention then a lot of the times that person won’t let you speak, like the saying can’t get a word in edge wise.”

**If the teacher called on you to give an answer even if you didn’t raise your hand, how comfortable would you be to answer?**

“It would depend on the question s/he asked and how knowledgeable I felt about it. So if I felt I was knowledgeable I wouldn’t have a problem with it at all but if I didn’t, I’d be very very uncomfortable because I’ll be afraid I am going to say the wrong thing.”

**Say if you are on the spot and you are not knowledgeable?**

“I’d be really really nervous.”

But you will answer. What will you say? Well right now I will probably say that this really hard for me. That's probably what, I'd say first and then I would try my best to try and give my opinion or how I felt about something.

**Would ever consider saying I don't know or I'll pass?**

"I would probably consider it in my mind but I don't think I would say it because if I did I would feel lie I'd look stupid."

**And what about the first one, when you said, "this is really hard"?**

"That to me would make me feel like I am stupid it's just hard for me to express myself in front of a lot of people."

**When you said the whole sentence then it makes sense expressing whether it's right or wrong in front of all these people, but when you just say "This is really hard" then is it subject matter is really hard?**

"Oh...so if I just say one word it would be really vague. They'd have to figure out what was hard about it."

**If a teacher made everybody speak in class instead of only asking only those students who raise their hands, do you think the teacher is right in doing so?**

Well that's kind of hard. The reason I say that's hard is because I think yes and no, because I think everybody should speak up in class but there are some people who have difficulty speaking up, so its not fair to expect them to do something that's really hard for them to do until they are comfortable enough to be able to do it.

**What if they will never be comfortable?**

That's true. That's the other thing, if they are not required to speak up they won't be comfortable ever.

**Do you feel comfortable being the first person to respond to a teacher's question when nobody around you is raising his/her hand? Why/ Why Not?**

"I do and I don't. As long as I am confident that I know what I am talking about yeah I like to speak up first because it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like "Hey, I know what I am talking about; I get this; I understand this, and I have something to say." But if I don't ...oh no...Heck no...If I have any doubt...no."

**How do you feel group work adds to your interaction with fellow students?**

"You mean within the classroom?"

**Me: in and outside the classroom— both**

interviewee: "it helps you to get to know the other students and it helps you to maybe know that, say it was a writing class and if you think that your paper is really bad and their's is going to be better than yours but when you get in groups and you compare everyone's papers, maybe yours might not be so bad after all; it doesn't mean that you're the only one that's not perfect, other people are not perfect either."

**If there were no group works, do you think you would feel that you would get to know more of you classmates? Why/ Why Not?**

"No."

**Why?**

"Because you don't get to interact with them. They are just there in the classroom and you are just in your own little space and you don't get to get into other people's spaces. You just wouldn't know who anybody was because you are not getting together, so you'd be working on your stuff, they'd be working on their stuff so that would be more competitive in a way."

**Would you rather a teacher lecture for the entire class time and you take notes, or the teacher give some text related information and involved the entire class in discussion about the text? Explain your answer.**

“I think I would rather the teacher give information and then discuss within the classroom because it seems to me, so far, that you learn more that way. Because everybody is interacting and even if you are not giving opinions at least you are listening to other people’s opinions about things.”

**When did you discover this type of learning?**

Just now– this term.

**Before you discovered this, what did you think of when you thought of higher education? Of a typical classroom?**

“I thought of sitting in a big room and listening to this really really educated, smart person, just telling all kinds of stuff about things. I was in a class like that quite a few years ago. It was a huge lecture room and that’s all that happened – lecture, and it was hard for me but I got it together.”

**What are the benefits of that type of teaching?**

“I don’t think there are a whole lot.”

What about the interactive type?

“It’s more relaxing, you are not nervous and if you made a mistake its ok because everybody else is doing the same thing that you are. What you just got telling me about the two ways of teaching works (crying), how the group thing works and the....

[Could not complete the conversation because the student started crying...later on she commented, “And I always wondered why it was hard for me to speak up.”]

(Still need to do: I have included some recommendations within the methodology. I need to do a conclusion restating that this research is just a small part of what feminist pedagogy is about etc...)

## **Appendix B**

### **Proposal**

#### **Title:**

Feminist Pedagogy in University Classroom: Understanding the classroom as a place where knowledge is created as opposed to knowledge being delivered to students

#### **Introduction:**

Having an interest in the importance of higher education and student success, I want to continue my research from where I left off this summer: the relationship between college success and race, class, and gender from administration's perspective to education as it really happens in a classroom. I want to look at how knowledge is exchanged as a result of teacher student interaction. The relationship and power structure within a classroom is common and often assumed when a teacher with full authority comes in the classroom, gives a lecture and the students, as receivers, are supposed to learn from the teacher's point of view; there is no room from discussion, or as bell hooks says there will be no room for transgression.

There is a need for research into how a classroom operates. United States is a melting pot of social, racial and sexual diversity. In order to understand oppression and to have a safe place to explore oppression requires an environment in which both the privileged and the underprivileged groups can come together to talk about their experiences without fear of being silenced. This does not mean that discussions will be experience based only. The teacher, with the power vested in him/her has to facilitate the class to ensure that discussion is text related, and that students are cognitively engaging the material to their experience and interaction with the world outside the classroom. As Bernice L. Hausman, an associate professor in the Department

of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University says, “The use of feminist pedagogy in the classroom means that students are responsible for the creation of knowledge than they are in a traditional classroom.”

Hausman’s statement allows me to move to the next possible question Why feminist Pedagogy? There are other names given to the facilitative method where teachers do not use lecturing as a method of teaching, so how different is feminist pedagogy? Again I will refer to Hausman’s statement,

A feminist classroom focuses attention on the interested, or political, nature of all interpretations. Students are never required to hold any particular view; students will be required to understand both their own views and views that they do not agree with. Feminist theory and pedagogy require students and faculty to understand *and be responsible for* the particular positions that they take up, defend, and espouse. That means realizing the political, social, and economic stakes in any idea, theory, or action.

The goal of the feminist classroom is to ensure that students understand that knowledge is created through of life experiences, but in order to understand experiences in a duality of privilege and underprivileged, oppressor and oppressed, master and slave etcetera, students have to look objectively as issues and defend their position. This also means that a feminist classroom allows students to welcome new ideas and objectives which they can use to either support or debunk their previous positions. Another thing to consider about a feminist classroom is that it looks at issues of race, class and gender, especially from the lens of the oppressed.



### Statement of Objectives:

This research will enable me to explore the benefits of the feminist pedagogy and the risks associated with this form of teaching. I want to:

- explore the students' expectations of their teachers
- listen to what the students want to learn versus what the teacher wants to teach
- observe how matters of gender, race, and class, and socio-economic and political issues are addressed in a feminist classroom.

### Work Plan

I plan to use three forms of research methods for this project along with resources compiled by experts who have already done research in this field:

- Observation in classroom
- Group surveys
- Case studies- that will look at the student orientated learning method from the student's perspective

I am, particularly, interested in looking at how a university classroom operates using the most common mode of teaching used, that is, lecturing, and the new method that allows for cognitive learning. I will look at who speaks a lot men or women; expectations/ stereotypes of a pro-feminist teacher; gendered remarks amongst students; who gets the most attention from the teacher: males or females. The purpose of this paper is to look at the masculine way of teaching, that is, lecturing, which is authoritative and memory based versus the feminine way that is exploratory and interactive. This paper asserts education should be a two way street of learning where the teacher knows he/she has authority in classroom because of his/her education but

instead of using it for control and to show power, the teacher should be a facilitator allowing the classroom to be a place where ideas are developed as well as exchanged. Students should be allowed to use their life experiences and their ability to think critically to achieve their education goals. With this type of learning, students will have a better grasp of what the real world is like where nobody feeds them answers; they have to develop their own strategies to stand out in a crowd. Race and class also are connected to gender discussions because the three are interconnected so there may be some reference to them in my paper but they will not be my primary focus.

## **Appendix C**

### **Annotated Bibliography**

In *Creating Significant learning Experiences*, L. Dee Fink argues that traditional forms of learning instructions are not going to work effectively in this day and age. Fink states that lecturing is by far the dominant method of teaching. Lecturing may be the best made for the professor to spend the class time professing his/her knowledge on a particular subject but it is opinionated and subjective to the professor's likes/ dislikes and life experiences. Additionally, it forces students to memorize material and spit it out on paper during exams, making education a term by term learning chore instead of lifelong joy.

Students who learn in this type of environment have difficulty in “reflexive thinking and metacognition” due to their inability to think on their own. However, why would there be weariness about changing to other modes? Lecturing seems like- as I experienced it in high school in Fiji and then in some classes in the community college- is only done to pass the class with a decent grade, whatever that may be depends on what the student wants. For instance in my Political Science 201, 202, and 203 classes at Portland Community College, Cascade Campus, the classes were taught by an immigrant professor from China; it was difficult to understand him clearly but he wrote down all the essays and lecture material on the blackboard; we just had to learn all six essays (more like cramming the material word for word) and spitting out two out of six essays during in-class exams. How much do I remember out of it five years later- nothing really.

Fink questions the teachers “What is the distinctive educational impact you would like for your teaching and your courses to have on your students?” (9); and the responses he gets include:

- apply and use what they learn in real life situations
- experience the “Joy of Learning”
- think about problems and issues in integrated ways, rather than in separate and compartmentalized ways
- be creative problem solvers
- continue to grow as critical thinkers

With so many positive ideals and high hopes for their students teachers forget that lecturing takes away from creativity and often implies that there is one way of understanding the material- the way the teacher wants students to because if students don't or they try to think outside of the box then their grades will suffer. When critical analysis and making through the class with a decent grade are presented as choices students will choose making through the class because according to my own experience it does not feel good to have one's ideas and opinions challenged or having one's whole world idea change because of several other ways of thinking about a concept.

Fink says

To be able to think critically is to first realize that knowledge/ truth is conditioned by power. What that means is that one's understanding of the world is biased by one's social location in society, and therefore, all perspectives are partial. In order to have a fuller view of what is really happening in the world, one needs to step outside of one's biased/ cultural lens that limits one's view and to be reflective of this process of attempting to be “critical” as opposed to accepting authority without questions (11).

Again, going back to the traditional mode of teaching one can see the problems that will arise if say for instance, a professor claiming expertise in rural Russian class and social structure because he lived in the setting for five years starts discussing about life of women in the area, he certainly does not have the authority because he lived there for five years only, while the women live there whole of their life; he was a mere observer; he was an outsider who was looking inside because if things didn't turn out as he would have expected he knew he could come back to his lifestyle. The professor may have knowledge but he can not be an authority on the subject because he will discuss the issue from a subjective view point. If however, a student in the class who lived in a similar background, had some insight but is not given the opportunity to speak in class then the student feels s/he has to look at the world from the professor's perspective.

Fink presents the old and new paradigms for college teaching (19)

	Old Paradigm	New Paradigm
Knowledge	Transferred from faculty to students	Jointly constructed by students and faculty
Student	Passive vessel to be filled by faculty's knowledge	Active constructor, discoverer, transformer of knowledge
Mode of learning	Memorizing	Relating
Relationships	Impersonal relationship among students and between faculty and students	Personal relationship among students and between faculty and students
Context	Competitive, individualistic	Cooperative learning in classroom and cooperative teams among faculty
Climate	Conformity, cultural uniformity	Diversity and personal esteem; cultural diversity and commonality
Power	Faculty holds and exercises power, authority, and control	Students are empowered; power is shared among students and between students and faculty
Ways of knowing	Logical-scientific	Narrative
Technology use	Drill and practice; textbook substitute; chalk-and-talk substitute	Problem solving, communication, collaboration, information access, expression
Teaching assumption	Any expert can teach	Teaching is complex and requires considerable training

These are some ways the old and the new paradigm differ; looked closely the old paradigm confirms a masculine approach to education, which offers less support and looks at education as only for the fortunate, elite individuals. It overlooks the idea that just as there are different people there should be different learning styles to accommodate all.

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Fink, L. Dee, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses*. California: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.

Nancy Buffington, author of *When Teachers Aren't Nice: bell hooks and Feminist Pedagogy*, argues the teaching should be an interactive process where students and teacher work together to enhance cognitive learning, instead of using hierarchical power structure where a teacher sees his/her role as the know-it-all and the student sits and absorbs all that the teacher says instead of having the courage or being allowed to state his/ her opinions and discussion on a subject matter.

Buffington uses bell hooks' teaching style and expertise on the subject to strengthen her argument. According to her, hook argues that feminist teachers can use the power vested in them by their status as educators to ensure progressive learning behavior in their students that is not limited to the classroom but incorporates their life experience and relationship to the outside world (Buffington, 6). The traditional method of teaching presents a masculine approach to education where students are viewed as being in a classroom to receive words of wisdom that a professor has to impart; it prevents students from interacting, finding answers for themselves,

and knowing that their professors are going to listen to their ideas and interact with them intellectually.

While refusing to be a controlling teacher, hooks understands that teachers are supposed to be the force behind the interactions that goes on in classrooms, but instead of taking power, hooks “seeks a form of legitimate power in the classroom, and it seems that she persuades her students to grant authority to her” (qtd in Buffington, 6). This type of power system in the classroom allows the students to know their teacher’s teaching style and to understand what is expected of them during the term.

Education is about perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, judging, reasoning, and imagining; if however reasoning, or imagining is missing, which will be the case in a typical lecture based classroom, because the professor will give students his/ her idea of how it is supposed to be, then students will miss out on using their experiences to apply to their learning; therefore, they get used to see the world from someone else’s perspective, which does not prepare them for the real world.

Using the non-authoritative feminist approach to teaching means that both the teacher and the students are learning; the teacher is the facilitator and knows when to use the power vested in her/him to control and focus discussion and ensure that discussion is happening in a safe environment. Like Buffington says “Conflict and struggle are vital parts of revolutionary feminist pedagogy. My students may not always feel comfortable with what they read, say or hear in my class. But they’re thinking, learning, and changing. And that’s what I want. After all, I’m not their mother. I’m their teacher” (12). This also speaks about the stereotypical role of a female teacher, as the nurturing, mother like role modal and creates a struggle for those students

who have grown up knowing that teachers are separate entities: unfriendly and unforgiving, and authoritative.

When students are introduced to leaning style discussed by Buffington, it may seem incompetent and unrealistic, just like the first time I was introduced to the subject of multi-writing in the English department at Eastern Oregon University (EOU), I had never done anything without a syllabus ; not knowing the due dates, having the freedom of selecting my own topics for the portfolio and going through a class without an exam to show how I was progressing seemed like a failure to the purpose of being in a classroom. I wanted to have a teacher tell me what I was supposed to do or not do. But navigating the classroom with some outside meetings with the professor allowed me to see learning as a process not just for grades to make to the next level , but as an act that was suppose to be enjoyed as an intellectual. This type of learning allows students to be self motivated, and think of education as a life long process not just four years of undergraduate studies to get a job.

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Buffington, Nancy. *When Teachers Aren't Nice: bell hooks and Feminist Pedagogy*. RIEDEC1993. 199312. ED35913. ERIC, 29, Sept. 2006.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks discusses education as a means of overcoming barriers imposed by race, sex, class boundaries. Hooks argues that education should be a path to socio-economic and political liberation for those who have been oppressed. She says that classroom is a place where the teacher and the students come together as learners to attain freedom. Hooks identifies cultural pluralism as the reason for the need to teach transgression in order to not eradicate, as it is not only difficult but impossible to erase centuries old racial, sexual and social memories of oppression, but to make it easier to express and examine how such oppression connect to our situations today and how we can work towards overcoming the damage done.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York



Routledge, 1994.

*Talking Back: thinking feminist; thinking black*, by bell hooks, discusses education as the first step to liberty from domination. Education is about situating an issue in the context of one's own experience, instead of accommodating one's experience to qualify an issue; or adapting oneself to someone else's idea. According to hooks, this type of leaning is only possible when students and teacher understand the importance of positive communication in classrooms. Hooks states that education should be about freedom to: explore, understand, and self-actualize in order for an individual to make sense of her/his experience in relation to her/his interaction with the world outside of the classroom. Talking back is about making sure that one's experience is heard.

hooks, bell. *Talking Back: thinking feminist; thinking black*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.

Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* defines education as a path to critical consciousness. Freire looks at the "banking" concept in education, which separates students and teachers into separate spheres. The banking system assumes that students do not know anything when they come into a classroom to attain an education. The teacher is seen as the all-knowing educator with all the necessary ideas for the student to learn in order to be successful. This type of learning is memory based; instead of producing great thinkers, this form of education produces excellent test takers and mimickers. Freire argues that this type of educational system is a practice of oppression where the oppressor wants mere followers of his ideas and beliefs. It reinforces the system of oppression that has been used globally for centuries to allow the oppressors to have control over certain groups of people racially, sexually and/or socially. Freire states that the banking system of education does not allow learners to engage in cognitive learning, which is an important step in practicing freedom to think for oneself.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1984.

Linda Markowitz, author of *Unmasking moral dichotomies can feminist pedagogy overcome student resistance*, argues that feminist pedagogy allows students to engage in cognitive learning, which is difficult to do in a traditional classroom. Diving situations, ideas, issues and/or concepts into a dichotomy of good and bad, and positive and negative prevents students from looking at the complexity of a situation or an issue. It prevents students from delving deeper than what seems morally righteous on the surface. Markowitz says that students need to step away from moral dichotomies and focus on the social construction of meaning. Experience alone does not have a valid function, but if students can situate their experiences in to the broader social context then they can see how the society shapes peoples lives and how creating a duality is enough. The author looks at the importance of encouraging students to see the social construction of knowledge in order to understand oppression and inequality.

Markowitz, Linda. *Unmasking moral dichotomies can feminist pedagogy overcome student resistance?* Gender and Education v17 n1 p39-55 Mar 2005. 7, Nov. 2006 ERIC Academic Search Premier

Becky Ropers-Huilman, author of *Scholarship on the Other Side: Power and Caring in Feminist Education: (parts 1-3)*, explores the complexity of implementing feminist pedagogy in classrooms as well as making sure that students learn the material correctly. While a feminist teacher's goal is to empower students to take charge of their own leanings, she is also expected to ensure that students fulfill the required course outcomes for the term/ semester. Ropers-Huilman says that feminist teaching is taking place in institutions which are built on power, authority, and control. Teaching about care and empowerment is not only difficult but also risky because it expects students to be active participants in discussion, learn to see and talk about oppression, inequality and diversity, which they are not trained to do. The author discusses her experience as a feminist student moving towards becoming a feminist teacher and the difficulties, barriers, and powerlessness that educators may experience while trying to practice feminist pedagogy in classrooms.

Ropers-Huilman, Becky. *Scholarship on the Other Side: Power and Caring in Feminist Education: (parts 1-3)* NWSA Journal, 11 (1): 118+; 125+; 131+, Spring 1999, ISSN 1040-0656. Indiana University Press. 8, Oct. 2006. Contemporary Women's Issues.

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