On Good Authority: Towards Feminist Pedagogies

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Abstract

This thesis comprises an analysis of ways to approach developing feminist pedagogies. Its main premise is that given the ideological, political and problematic nature of teaching and learning within educational institutions, it is not possible to define and prescribe a certain set of teaching behaviours that would constitute 'successful feminist pedagogy' in all circumstances. Instead, the thesis explores the changing nature of feminist theories, particularly the shift from essentialist feminism to feminisms of difference. It also considers a range of other influences on feminist teachers as they develop their approaches to teaching. These influences include critical and radical pedagogical theories; the impact of women on the teaching profession; postmodernism; using critique and reflection within the classroom; the nature of relationships in classrooms; the role of teacher education; and developments within English education.

Since I am a feminist English teacher, I draw on my own classroom experiences, both at secondary and pre-service teacher education levels. I use these experiences not as models of feminist teaching practice, but as material to reflect on ways in which a feminist teacher might move towards creating intellectual imaginings for changing her classroom work so that it contributes to an ever-evolving vision of a different feminist future.

The thesis is also concerned with the processes involved in intellectual work and in becoming a feminist teacher. Within the text I have used both journal writing, and personal reflection on classroom events, to disrupt the otherwise authoritative tendencies of thesis statements. This is why, rather than coming to conclusions about the specific attributes of feminist classrooms, I suggest ways in which feminist teachers can work on their own transition towards reflective, critical and feminist classroom practices.
Preface

I am by no means alone as a feminist postmodernist in struggling with such concepts as authority, authoring, and authenticity. Women, even ‘strong feminists’, have existed as outsiders to the established patriarchal view of the world, and have never been accepted by it as authoritative figures or speakers. We have struggled to have our spoken and written voices acknowledged as ‘authoring’ voices, as voices which speak significant things. We have lived on the fringes of patriarchy, side-lined from its authentic and significant achievements. We have been seen as hesitant, emotional, intuitive and unimportant contributors to the history of the world. That I challenge this allocation of a position of lesser significance for women in relation to men, and conceive it to be a construction rather than a natural and inevitable situation, positions me clearly as a feminist. That I am of an understanding that patriarchy is but one possible way of constructing and organising perceptions of how society functions, and that I can conceive of differently-equal-other ways of constructing it, locates me within a postmodern framework of thinking.

As a postmodern feminist I question mainstream epistemologies, particularly in relation to what they have regarded as significant to record as history; what they have used to establish as psychological and sociological norms; the ways in which they have created hierarchical and binary oppositional ways of thinking and structural organisations; and the status and set of ‘natural’ qualities which they have allocated to women.

I have been a teacher for 26 years. I align myself with those pedagogical theorists who see that while education is often used as a conservative tool for the maintenance of social, political and intellectual order, it can also be used for democratic, emancipatory purposes to help people become critical thinkers, and capable of carrying out transformative actions which will help create a more just world to support and celebrate people’s different abilities and ways of living.

There are times when, within my thinking and actions as a teacher and an intellectual, these positions - feminist, postmodern and democratic, -
throw up some ambiguities. I don’t deny these, nor do I necessarily want to work to resolve them. For example, as a feminist I do want to see the world change its views, its laws, its attitudes and frequently appalling behaviours towards women. Schools and schooling can play a significant but by no means exclusive role in this process. I believe that schools and teachers must play an active, affirmative role in bringing about transformations in the experiences of girls and women. As a democratic teacher I understand that boys and men also need to have the opportunity for learning and changing, and that the freedom of any group depends on the freedom of other groups. Oppression serves no one. I recognise, too, that gender issues are not the only cause of people’s oppression and that feminism has sometimes been remiss in overlooking this.

Postmodernism casts doubt on the ability of any activity to achieve its goals without some negative ramification. Postmodern thinkers encourage scepticism in relation to any ideas claiming to be true, or better, or beneficial, or democratic. We will not, through rational thought, and good, fair actions create a better world, they say. No one is not enmeshed in plays of power, not one of us is free from engagement with systems which bind us to complicit ways of behaving. Working for change always involves the risk of imposing yet another correct regime on the very people we are hoping to liberate. What I have taken from postmodern thinking is the challenge, and often intellectual pleasure, to keep searching for meanings rather than to find one, and then work to impose it on others. What I have tried to do in this thesis, and I hope beyond it, is to pursue both different possible meanings, and meanings in different possibilities.

Apart from the traditional work associated with the development of a thesis, such as reading, thinking and writing, I also invited a group of friends and colleagues to discuss some of my developing ideas as I went along, the ‘dinner party’ group. We met for about a year, over evening meals which I prepared, while they offered responses to my material and commented on their own classroom work as feminists who were trying to involve that side of themselves in their approaches to teaching. They represented different teaching situations and a range of curriculum areas. A major focus during these discussions was on the nature of the authority they used as teachers, and the extent to which they felt they could ‘make a feminist difference’ for the girls in their classes. In addition, I have,
throughout, kept a journal to record the intellectual, personal and emotional journey of my exploration of feminist pedagogies, and I have chosen to include some excerpts from it, in the text of the thesis, which I think demonstrate some of the doubts, anxieties, encouragements and developments I have experienced along the way.

I begin the thesis with a review of the different steps that feminisms are taking in pursuit of revising the images and possibilities for women’s lives, particularly relating it to their work within education as teachers. I look at other theorists within education and examine their contributions and limitations in relation to feminists’ dreams for the education of girls and women in Chapter two. Within what is mostly a modernist framework I explore possible alliances that feminists could make with sympathetic colleagues in order to promote their ideas for feminist pedagogies. In my third chapter the aim is to put the dreams of feminist teachers under the scrutiny of postmodern thinking, in order to consider how to proceed towards the development of new feminist pedagogies. This process leads me in chapter four towards imaginings rather than definitions, and into reflections on aspects of my own teaching to discover their possibilities for different future development.

The complicated business of becoming a feminist teacher is reflected on in chapters five and six, in the latter with a particular focus on the development of classroom relationships, teacher-student and student-student, which are both passionate, yet integer. More specific strategies for classroom use are examined in chapter seven. Both the democratic possibilities of using critique within the classroom, and some of its risks, are analysed. The implications of feminist pedagogy both for teacher education and English teaching are considered in chapters eight and nine.

In what I hope is not a conclusion to the discussion about the development of feminist pedagogies, I finish the thesis with some consideration of the ability of feminists to keep exploring, constantly, the theoretical possibilities of our classrooms, and to keep our practice under the scrutiny of these ongoing theoretical developments. We need to ‘dreamlive’ our visions of feminist utopian futures rather than seek to execute them upon others.
But first

A Word on Methodology, or
The Methodology of the Word

As soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity.
- Jacques Derrida in “The Law of Genre”

The neutral language with which notions of ability, interest and motivation are articulated in educational discourse makes unproblematic the question of what constitutes the acceptable. Simultaneously, the internalised practices that support the reproduction of the status quo hide the terms of how the acceptable is designated.”
- Magda Lewis in Without a Word: teaching beyond women’s silence.

The task of a PhD and what to make of it
Putting up alternatives to accepted practice is what feminists do. Yet in doing so we regularly face criticism, and also endanger our status as academics. In dealing with the subject matter of this thesis, and in trying to use some ways of working which are not typical for doctoral scholarship, I know that I run the risk of criticism. However as a teacher I have discovered that unless I stand outside mainstream pedagogy I simply contribute to the perpetuation “of those forms of subjectivity preferred by the dominant culture” (Peters 1995, p89). In this situation of writing a doctoral thesis I have had to face up to the issues of what constitutes an appropriate genre for academic writing.

To speak from outside the frames of phallocentric discourse means that women must disrupt both its content and its form. For women, taking up the word can only be a political act. To write/speak with political meaning necessitates taking up the personal as the cutting edge of the political. (Lewis 1993, p47)

For me, writing is not simply a tool which I use to convey information. It is not just the content of writing which can convey meaning to others;
the form it takes is also of significance. The way in which writing is taught, and how it is used in a classroom to promote learning and the self-esteem of learners, can become an important part of a feminist teacher’s agenda. I shall return to this issue throughout this chapter.

Doctoral work is expected to be scholarship of very high academic standing, meeting recognised international standards. It is set within the long tradition of formal, impersonal, expository writing which is constructed as a neutral, systematic scientific body of knowledge. It is also expected to make an original contribution to a field of study. How such scholarship comes to be judged as meeting these standards and objectives is not clear. The process of writing a Ph D can therefore be fraught when not only the subject matter is regarded as controversial, but the methodology and the style selected for writing appear to be unusual as well. Lyotard, that ‘exemplary postmodernist’ as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson describe him (Nicholson ed, 1990), says that he is not so much interested in whether philosophy or scholarship is original, predictive, or true, but whether or not it has ‘strategic value’ in that it causes discussion leading to the reconsideration of our present ways of thinking and acting (Peters 1995, xxxiii). Given my understanding and experiences of the complexities of classrooms, students and teachers, I want to suggest that feminist scholarship about pedagogy needs to be creative and strategic, so that teachers can select from it, construct and reconstruct a range of learning situations with, and for agency (Derrida, in Usher and Edwards 1995, p147).

There is also an issue of whether doctoral work is to be viewed as a kind of ‘apprenticeship’, the completion of which allows a person entry to the higher world of the academe; or whether it should represent a more creative and personal undertaking, in which the author boldly uses the process of writing in a transformative way, including allowing the emergence of ideas unforeseen in the beginning proposal. These considerations, plus some others associated with authorship and ownership of the material being presented in any thesis, may also be influenced by the age and the experiences of the candidate for the Ph D. In my case I am nearly 50 and over half my life has been spent in direct contact and interaction with my chosen fields of study - the classroom, and feminist theories. In this prolegomenal essay-chapter I intend to
address some of these issues and how they have affected my choices of methodology, and my approaches to writing the text of the thesis.

26th September, 1996.

I cannot/will not deny that this section is part of the revision of the thesis. It was not part of the original document. It has been impossible to write it naively as if it was. It is knowingly written to clarify and confront certain concerns about the nature of the thesis and its academic standing. It is also aimed to articulate more fully the basis of the thesis, its theoretical stance and its methodology. It is therefore both an intrusion on the original, and a development or extension of it. My thinking has continued from when I finished the original version back in June.

For example, it is since completing the thesis that I have found Magda Gere Lewis' book *Without a Word: teaching beyond women's silence*. Her purpose is to examine how the silences of women, students and teachers function in academic institutions, and what using a feminist pedagogy might do to alleviate some of the tensions, oppressions, vulnerabilities and resistances caused by the existence of these silences. Her writing style involves weaving personal narrative with theoretical analyses; building on, linking herself with and extending the work of other writers in the field; critiquing some of it as well; connecting with, identifying with other women in a radical feminist way, yet remembering the need for us not to universalise about each other’s situations. In my view perhaps she is not looking at the methods and strategies available to teachers to transform their classrooms; maybe she doesn’t look enough at pedagogical theory that might be supportive and helpful to her and us as feminist teachers. She does not spell out ways in which postmodernism can change our ways of thinking, though clearly she has a sense of the way in which feminism and postmodernism both depend on an analysis which breaks down the metanarrative position of modernist thinking. But our projects have different goals: she deals exclusively with adult education in the university setting. This is not meant as a criticism of her book.
which I appreciated in every way, but as a comment on the different areas in which we have each been working.

Her work represents and exemplifies what is also my commitment to a belief that the business of feminist pedagogy - all those intellectual, emotional, physical, managerial, tangible and intangible factors which go to make up the environment and impact of a classroom on the lives of students and teachers, their activities and experiences - is both controversial and never-ending. Being a feminist teacher has to remain, always, demanding, difficult, radically over the edge, off the wall, over the top, and challenging of inviolable structures.

The text above is an extract from my on-going working journal. I indicated in the Abstract and the Preface to the thesis that I would include extracts from my journal in the text. The full journal is a very extensive document which is why I have made selections from it. There are several reasons for including sections from it. First, the writing is more immediate and largely uncensored and unedited which both gives a sense of my 'first', provisional impressions or reactions to ideas, and also allows my more informal speaking/thinking voice to emerge. For me, a feminist teacher, these are extremely important elements in the learning process. Classrooms and other learning environments have often not permitted students the opportunity to trust their own opinions and responses, and have encouraged them to wait passively for the teacher's more authoritative opinion on what is to be learnt. Students have come to distrust their own responses, and unless encouraged will not take the risk of exposing their tentative ideas in public. As I later discuss in the thesis it is of importance that students become active participants in their learning, in order to gain a sense of the power of their own voices, develop their abilities, and formulate responses of their own.

Second, in the classroom I would, as teacher, model such activities. I see this thesis as a learning environment too, and accordingly wanted to demonstrate elements in the process of writing it where I had
doubts, and experimented with tentative, immediate responses. For the ‘dinner party group’ of my feminist teacher colleagues this became one of the greatest risks that they felt they might face - being tentative or provisional in their presentation of ‘knowledge’ to classes. I was more convinced about its usefulness as a teaching and learning strategy to demonstrate that the classroom, including the teacher, needed to be a community of learners. Hence the consideration of possibilities and first reactions within my journal.

Finally, these journal entries often functioned for me to overcome a writer’s block, such as when I became tangled in my thinking, or silenced by the brilliance of another theorist whose work I had just read, and was afraid because of my own inadequacies to write anything at all. It is part of my aim to be an ‘honest’, feminist, academic writer that I make visible my own processes as a writer, and not pretend that the text came out neatly and clearly in final publishable form. A feminist teacher (I) can not be advocating one approach to teaching and learning which she then is unwilling to demonstrate herself.

There are other writing styles in the text of the thesis which challenge the conventions of traditional, scholarly writing. These are autobiographical, metaphorical and created fictional/factual classroom scenes. Each has a slightly different purpose in the text as a whole, but in general they serve a common aim. The autobiographical sections are intended to give the reader a sense of the locations or different positions and experiences that I have had which background my development as a feminist teacher. They personalise the text and make me visible to the reader; they are selected pieces of autobiography from material which I have written for my own and my family’s interest. My autobiography contains several elements which place me on the margins of the dominant male, white, middle-class, heterosexual, hegemonic patriarchy which has constituted the prevailing educational discourse. It is the recognition of our marginalisation and the way it leads to our oppression which is at the heart of feminists’ aims to reclaim and transform our situations from always being ‘other’ to the patriarchal norm. Our personal experience of being marginalised is, through consciousness raising, what becomes the core of our drive to
engage in political action to change the situations we find ourselves in. In addition, as Magda Lewis (1993) points out, teaching and learning experiences that occur within classrooms are individuals' stories: that is, our experiences of schooling, whether as teachers or students, are narrators' stories. "There is no outside text" ("Il n'y a pas de hors-texte", Derrida, quoted in Usher and Edwards 1995, p144) which gives us the true story of what happened in the classroom situation. We can only use memory and response, which will traverse all of the personal, the intellectual, and the political, in reporting classroom events. This is why I see a significant role for personalised experience to be recounted in the thesis.

Metaphorical writing reminds us that all texts have a multiple and layered nature, that there are many possible and different readings of all texts; that there is no 'real truth', no one way of reading each other, our actions and reactions, our classrooms and their curricula, the 'needs' of our students, nor our possible influences on them. Often, in the past, I have experienced academic texts as not drawing attention to their being 'written', so that I have focused on what they were about, as if they were objectively, wisely and neutrally about something which I needed to learn. It is through feminist, postmodern and critical theories that I have learnt to be aware of the textuality of academic writing. I do not want any reader of my text to be seduced into accepting this text as objective and scholarly information, so in some parts, for example "Beginnings", or pages 70 -72 Thinking Postmodern, I have presented textual material so obviously metaphorical or autobiographical that it is always open to the reader's response.

The reporting of classroom situations is also present in the thesis. These situations sometimes rely on glimpses into memories of a class I taught, or they focus on how and why over time I developed a strategy differently. Sometimes I have created a fictional scenario, based on multiple memories of classroom interactions which I have many times encountered or heard about from other teachers. These are not intended to constitute empirical research. In not being empirical I was aiming to avoid commenting on other people's classrooms, and also I wanted to focus on revealing how it is possible to critique one's own classroom, and to start rebuilding or adding to its potential as a
feminist transformative environment. I was not wanting to observe classrooms, their students and teachers, in order to deduce the qualities that will help create radical, feminist, postmodern pedagogy. I am rejecting the notion that I will find by the acts of reading texts - whether they are classrooms, teachers, students, books on radical feminist pedagogy or postmodernism - meanings or significances that are waiting to be revealed. Rather, a significant aspect of my work has come to be about learning how to read, and, learning more about those reading processes of how to read, and how to work with the readings which I have developed. This wide range of readings helps to anchor me, to link me into the particular situations of classrooms, especially my own classroom so that I can select, reorganise, reconsider, reconstitute its many activities, physical, cognitive, and affective, giving me different possibilities for working within it.

In the text of this thesis, in relation to the development of feminist pedagogies I argue constantly about the impossibility of separating out the personal from the public, or the affective from the purely cognitive. And it is the case that in the written text of the thesis I similarly find it impossible to eliminate the personal, the tentative, the metaphorical. This is more a philosophical text than anything else, and I like Lyotard’s distinction between an expert and a philosopher: “an expert knows what he (sic) knows and what he does not know; the philosopher does not. The former concludes, whereas the latter questions” (Lyotard 1984). Hence, there are times when narratives from my teaching experience break in on the theoretical work, or when sections of the text are interrupted by personal reflection on readings, or autobiographical accounts.

My hope is that such an approach liberates the reader, as it liberated me as a writer, to be tentative rather then prescriptive about my considerations of what constitutes feminist pedagogies and how they could be implemented in actual, daily, functioning classrooms. I wanted to write as an experienced, practising teacher, and also respond to the helpful, inspirational work of many of the theorists I have read and considered. Often at the end of reading many of the books listed in the bibliography I felt let down by the writers’ failure to make links between their theoretical positions and classrooms with students in
them; or to take account of the many things on the minds of a teacher and her students, as they interact with each other day after day; in classrooms where collectively they have so many different agendas - institutional, personal, social, passionate, physical, vocational, intellectual - and such short teaching spaces, an hour at the most usually, to come together in a coherent and sustained way to advance their perceptions, understandings, skills and sense of achievement. There are so many factors in these classroom participants’ lives which mitigate against learning, and yet a feminist teacher will have some version of a vision through which she wants to offer opportunities to her students to change their lives, take advantage of possible options, learn to understand and respect each other and themselves, so that they can experience a hopeful, just, democratic way of life. Attempts at changing these ‘real’ classrooms (‘real’ only in the sense that they actually exist), will not be contained neatly within a single paradigm, there is no single principle of regularity which will transform them altogether into feminist paradises. What I have to offer is therefore more in the mode of a reflective narrative about feminist teaching, than an authoritative monologue on education.

In conclusion, the methodology of this thesis represents a reflective consideration of the practical and theoretical texts and experiences which have been part of my own emergingly feminist teaching. Why has reflection been so important to me? Reflection is not just the memory of an event. It asks us to say what is going on behind the event, or research or scholarship. For example, what epistemology is being used? Being reflective is not just being up front about our values and standpoints, it also helps us recognise our own immersion in the historical and social events, our complicity within them (Usher and Edwards 1995, p148). In my view this means experiencing theoretical and other types of material, not just as information to review, but as material which contributes to and problematises the situations under consideration. This kind of experiencing texts, rather than reviewing them, is referred to by Foucault as needing or evoking

‘care’;... a readiness to find what surrounds us as strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the
traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. (Foucault 1988, p.328)

I shall return to this subject of how I have dealt with texts by other theorists.

The central focus of the thesis
This is a thesis about teaching and learning within a feminist classroom environment, about becoming a feminist teacher, about working at it within school classrooms, particularly secondary school classrooms and tertiary classrooms. It is about what all of this means, about drawing together as many of the threads of a feminist learning environment as possible, without wrapping them up in such an exquisitely elegant and resolved parcel that it is too difficult to unravel them. It is a working document. I want the difficulties and inconsistencies of working in classrooms to be revealed, for the job is never a finished one.

In my view, and from my own experience, I see the feminist teacher often being a lonely and vulnerable member of educational institutions, and therefore in need of allies and support. I see her, me, wanting to and needing to work with many possibilities, not just a prescribed set of effective strategies. We need time to critique and reflect on our own work, often within the privacy of our own reading and thinking; sometimes alongside a supportive colleague, or group of colleagues. Our own consciousness-raising and support groups could be extremely important for the process. So, in the thesis I examine other approaches to teaching and learning which have practices and philosophies in common with feminist approaches. What follows is an introduction to some of them which will be further developed throughout the thesis.

A feminist pedagogy is not the result of a set of prescribed, successful strategies. But it will have some specific characteristics. It needs to be set in an openly personal, emotional, passionate, affective environment, where the ‘person’ of the teacher is known, and relationships are a crucially important element. This is why my familiarity and demonstrated comfortableness with such activities as personal response, autobiography, personal experience, and contextualisation
(or multilayered interactiveness) of learning have become a significant part of the thesis.

There will be a focus on valorising what skills women have, and what they have achieved, and how they perceive things often contributing different values and alternative ways of working.

Feminist pedagogies will use strategies of critical thinking. A working understanding of critical literacy should be explicitly taught and practised, in contexts which matter, and not just in English classrooms. The teacher will therefore be a prime model of such strategies, and allow herself to be assessed by them. In other words critical thinking strategies need to be employed as part of the actual functioning of the feminist teacher’s classroom. A function of these strategies will be that both theoretical and practical contexts and experiences will be problematised, ensuring that the constructed curricula of schools will never be allowed to be seen as ‘innocent’. I model this throughout, with reference to my teaching experience.

The classroom environment must be established as one in which individuals are respected, and students learn to recognise situations different from their own, but not through rigid behaviour codes or orthodoxies imposed by the authoritative people in the classroom. Strategies such as working within role for ‘experiential’ opportunities; viewing, sharing and hearing alternative explanations or perspectives; and working through different consequences of behaviours will be common. Tools for learning need to be consciously explained, and practised with: for example, becoming more knowing about how one reads and writes, or being able to participate in self and peer assessment. This is why the ‘bones’ of the reading and writing processes, my own as well, are rawly exposed. The writer at work is made visible.

I believe, and this too emerges from my own experiences, that the feminist teacher needs to have possibilities for change on her mind all the time, especially when it looks as though a particular resource or set of strategies begin to settle in and work well for her and her students.
We need to use our margins, our marginalities as feminist women within schooling, to radicalise and ‘electrify’ our teaching activities.

Throughout the thesis I want to invite other feminist teachers to consider their own locations within the feminisms available to us, to seek for allies, support, theoretical and practical, which help surround their, our, practice in some sense-making, ethical basis. We need to be able to admit difficult questions and searching analysis and critique, and to regularly dreamlive a vision, a future towards which we would like to make progress, and to not mind coming back to beginnings in order to reconsider what alternative paths could be taken.

**Facing some dilemmas**

For me the three most complicated issues which background this thesis on teaching and learning within a feminist classroom were dealing with the rich yet complex nature of different feminisms, coping with the enormous challenge of postmodernism to such an *essentially* pragmatic environment as the classroom, and placing my own experience/expertise as a classroom teacher in English, Teacher Education and Women’s Studies. This section will examine how I went about attempting to deal with these dilemmas.

First, feminisms. I don’t have to make a claim for feminism to be considered part of the pedagogical agenda. It is now an established part of educational initiatives and programmes.

Feminist researchers do not on the whole have to make the case for the legitimacy of gender as a field of inquiry in education. Instead they are engaged in extending, questioning and re-thinking their earlier theories and inquiries regarding just how gender is an issue in education and just what it means to do feminist research in education. (Yates 1993, p7)

I will not be tracing in great detail a complete review of feminist theory, because it would be impossible to trace the amount of material I have dealt with over 20 years of feminist teaching and learning. I have been teaching pre-service and in-service feminist issues in education courses, and writing teacher resource material during this time and I claim the right now to assume that material as an established part of my
professional and feminist heritage. This heritage is threaded throughout the thesis, with particular focus points being in the first five chapters. I will not rehearse a history of feminisms, what I will be trying to establish is ways in which feminist teachers can continue to develop, transform, critique, and reflect on their pedagogy, so that classrooms can become increasingly liberating environments for learners and for teachers. And I see the kind of pedagogy which will help in that transformative, transgressive process will draw not only on feminist theories, but also on critical and radical pedagogies, and on postmodern ways of thinking. These three elements will never be able to be used in a set formulaic way to resolve the issues of challenging the authority and power of classrooms, or of what and how to select curriculum content and emphasis, or in the selection of teaching methods and approaches to learning. They will constantly need to be juggled, re-arranged, questioned, even undermined in order to keep the thinking of the feminist teacher, me, critical, innovative, and unconvincing by the possibility that she may have reached a conclusion, solved the problems, and achieved her goals.

The world of the liberation movement is the world of tomorrow, a world whose inhabitants take risks, make quick decisions, put their lives in danger. (Sari Knopp Biklen, quoted in Yates 1993, p10).

Magda Lewis (1993) argues that what sets feminism apart from other forms of transformative practice in classrooms is its explicit focus on generating suggestions for practice based on the experiences of women, because it is “in our experience, not some abstraction of it - that we find both our subordination as well as our strength” (ibid p 5). This puts writing about women and our experience outside of the linear, logical progressive, ‘systematic’ structures often associated with traditional academic writing, and possibly makes aesthetic approaches more suitable, or at least as appropriate as other ways of writing and presenting. The dilemma however is that if we choose to write as feminists in a way which seems to be outside of phallocentric legitimacy, do we simply continue in what appears to the dominant authoritative male academic world to be marginal scholars? I think I need to assert the right to express my kind of text in a way which is not systematic, linear, step-by-step, because neither women’s lives with their intermingling of private and public, personal and political, nor the
emerging of feminisms, nor the experiences of teaching and learning are like that. In an exploration of feminist pedagogy different elements of the classroom environment keep intermingling simultaneously, preventing neat beginnings and endings, or clearly marked progressive steps, as I will demonstrate later in the thesis.

I will knowingly have to work with some of the contradictory elements which are visible within the various forms of feminism. Throughout the text I will refer to some of the different theoretical versions of feminism. The bases for my own feminism are eclectic in two senses. Over time I have moved through different phases as I explain in chapter 5, yet I retain some of each. But even now I can sense in my own responses to different ideas and happenings that I will interpret them differently depending on which ‘feminism’ I allow to dominate. For example as women and as teachers, feminists will sometimes focus on our ‘womanliness’, cultivating those qualities which within a gendered society are prescribed as suitable, and acceptable for women, such as being nurturing and able to deal with the emotional side of classroom events. Within the gendered discourse of education this is written as an ‘instinctive’ position for women to take up. But at the same time as we use this gendered discourse, we must be critiquing it as well. Particularly we need to resist the allocation of certain qualities automatically to those of us with female bodies. A skill which the feminist teacher needs to develop is how to resist gendered discourse and yet make use of it as well, to perceive it and yet to put it to the question. We must use the ambiguities which open up to us as women and feminists, and, search for a variety of ways of working. This will keep us (me) constantly in a position of becoming, rather than being a feminist teacher:

To pin down this instability is the first aim of feminism, which resolves certain perplexities in the history of feminism and its vacillations, but also points to its potentially inexhaustible flexibility in pursuing its aims. (Riley 1988, p98)

Next, postmodernism. When I began the Ph D process, I was not very familiar with postmodern theory in any really informed way, though I often participated in anti ‘po-mo’ jokes! I had, however, been aware of and was using deconstruction as a strategy in teacher education, and as a tool within English Education. I will use the term postmodern, rather
than poststructural because I am referring more to its influence on my ways of thinking, and the processes it initiates in my re-thinking elements of critical feminist pedagogy. In other words, postmodernism does not represent for me a fixed, theoretical paradigm which replaces all those which went before it. The terms are often used interchangeably anyway, with poststructural more likely to be used in the context of literary or cultural theory, referring to the actual working out of the theoretical approach in a particular context. I am more inclined to Patti Lather's view that postmodernism does not refer to a unified movement which we can readily define. Indeed she deliberately shirks the task of defining it, explaining that to do so would be anathema to its central spirit. It would 'domesticate' and fix it in an inappropriate formalist way. (Lather 1991, p 4-6). It originated as a critique of modernism, perhaps it is best understood as a state of mind, a critical self-referential posture and style, a different way of seeing and working.

Educational theory has traditionally been a modernist body of knowledge, 'naturally' fitting a modernist, enlightened, rational, progressive analysis and project - the very purpose of it being to help individuals gain increasing 'knowledge', and increasing independence to become knowing, self-directed individuals capable of rational individual agency. Education is used by societies as the main tool for passing on what are regarded as the essential social values and knowledge base for all their citizens to possess. Postmodern thinking about education has been one of the most disturbing influences for educationalists to consider since the late 1970s, and has been staunchly rejected by right wing opponents such as E. D. Hirsch (1988) or Allan Bloom (1987) in the United States who see it as an attack on the cultural heritage of the western world.1 Because of the difficulty of working out a specific model from its ways of thinking, postmodernism has been slow to make an impact on classroom practice.

By using a postmodern background to my thinking about education I am taking on a complex problem. I am trying to envisage how a feminist teacher might be, not just in abstract or in some potential future, but in the context of my own 26 years of teaching, and I am critiquing my practice in relation to this envisaging. The making of
knowledge about this, in the sense of changing classroom practice, whether mine or others, will not be in the truth of the written text, this one or any other, but in the effect of the written text on the thinking and practice of me and of other readers.

The value of being located in the postmodern is the greater possibility for disruption of the 'given'; and in education there are far too many givens in need of disruption. The emphasis on methods and techniques is itself a production of education's humanistic discourse. More than ever, then, education needs a critical scepticism and a suitable degree of the need for a careful deconstruction of the theorisations and discourses within which educational practice is located. (Usher and Edwards 1994, p31)

As a writer using postmodern ways of thinking I am writing to learn, and I am expecting my reader not to be seeking my meaning, but constituting her own, in her encultured, specific location.

It may be helpful to make an opening comment on the way in which I see feminism and postmodernism coming together within a consideration of pedagogies. There are some different perceptions of what their relationship can be, and how, if at all, they can usefully come together. I will briefly consider three approaches.

The first is demonstrated by Jane Flax (in Nicholson ed, 1990) who sees feminists and postmodernists as capable of being natural allies. She argues that feminisms are a species of the genus postmodern. Postmodernists challenge many of the current views of gender and the feminists who tend to universalise the situations of women across time, race, class, and sexuality to their thinking and writing. Flax argues that the development of deconstruction as an analytic tool has been of significant use to feminists, problematising the concept of gender. She considers that the new sensitivity of women to differences among themselves is a vital strength of postmodern feminisms, leading to them being always ambivalent, ambiguous, and offering multiple possibilities. In turn, and through these same strategies, feminist postmodernism constantly needs to deconstruct its own patriarchal limits.

On the other hand, there is the group of Radical feminists such as Christine de Stefano, Nancy Hartstock, Andrea Dworkin, Robin
Morgan, Renate Klein and many others who see that postmodernism prevents unity within the women’s movement.\textsuperscript{2} They argue that it is based on the philosophies of white, male, middle class intellectuals who are largely insensitive to gender concerns. This group of feminists is concerned about the potential of postmodern thinking to lead us into an extreme form of relativism which undermines the feminist political agenda for change. They see postmodern thinking as a dangerous distraction to focused, women-centred feminism.

The third group, of whom Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson (see Nicholson ed, 1990) are representative, believe that both feminists and postmodernists have invented new paradigms which we can draw on in our work towards changing situations for women. They argue that postmodernism is strong on metatheory, and feminism on social critique. Postmodernism provides valuable criticism of metanarratives, essentialism, and foundationalism; while feminism is strong on political and social agency. We need a combination of both movements to develop a pragmatic, yet fallible and cross-cultural analysis and practice which will allow us to develop feminisms - solidarity yet diversity, as in patchwork quilts.

Throughout the thesis I think I tread a slightly spiralling, turning- back-on-itself route, among all three of these positions, though at least in theory, I am probably closest to the first position. At times the pragmatic demands of the classroom make me need to come up with a particular way of doing things which I deem superior to other ways, because the classroom is a place where things have to happen. Students and teachers are practical workers making their ways through curriculum demands. So I am still committed to looking toward a feminist vision of how things could be for girls and women in an ‘ideal’ classroom. At other times I need the postmodern ways of thinking to challenge some of my common-sense, fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning situations.

Finally, my experience and age. I am a first generation NESC English teacher! I was trained and began my teaching in association with several members of the National English Syllabus Committee. As a consequence, whole language was my mother tongue as an English
teacher. I didn’t just teach reading, writing, speaking and listening. I also taught shaping, moving, viewing and watching. The Statement of Aims: English forms 3 - 5 which the NESC members wrote was not authorised by the New Zealand Department of Education until 1983. It was 14 contentious years in development, but draft versions were the basis of all the school schemes I worked with, and from which I developed my practice. Emerging from the Dartmouth Seminar, which was the first international meeting of teachers of English in 1966, the NESC Statement placed the focus of an English programme on the learner, rather than on an established or standard, content-based curriculum. This focus on the learner, on ways of using language creatively, responsively, integratedly, and on the processes and contexts of learning language, have continued to dominate the philosophy behind the English in the New Zealand Curriculum (1994) document. The other two major influences on the New Zealand English curriculum, gender and cultural literacy, have been more controversial but still have managed to retain a place in the curriculum statement.

New Zealand English teachers joined the international scene in English education in increasing numbers during the late 1970s, and remain a strong force within it today. The New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English was formed in 1980 and developed policies on biculturalism, gender, literacy, computers, and sexuality, among others. The NZATE representation on these policies to the Ministry of Education ensured that they were inscribed in curriculum and resource documents.

I can claim a major role in this work as: president of NZATE for nine years, 1983 - 1994; president of the International Federation for the Teaching of English (the outcome of Dartmouth) from 1989 until 1995; a member of the senior school English curriculum committee and principal writer of the 6th and 7th form English syllabus which has had a direct influence on the philosophy of English in the New Zealand Curriculum. Between 1980 and 1995 I have been in some role, major or advisory, on all developments in secondary English in New Zealand (except the unit standards, as a matter of principle), and I have participated in every international forum on the teaching of English, either as a keynote speaker or as a workshop leader. Some of these
events have been epiphanal to my professional development, particularly the 1984 international seminar held at East Lansing in Michigan where Frances Christie first presented her work on genre theory to an international forum (Christie 1985). Another significant conference for me was when I was asked by the Australian Association for the Teaching of English to do some analysis of their curriculum principles, and where I first met some of the leaders of the critical literacy and deconstructive readings movement, many of whom were feminists as well. I have worked in workshops often jointly contributing conference proceedings with John Dixon, James Moffett, Donald Graves, Margaret Gill, Bronwyn Mellor, Louise Rosenblatt, Dorothy Heathcote and many others (for example, Tchudi ed. 1985, Maguire ed. 1995), as well as gaining a Fulbright award to consider the teaching and learning of writing for teacher development purposes. Feminism, reader response, whole-language learning, cultural literacy, biculturalism, genre theory, deconstruction and drama as a learning medium are the major influences, through first hand collaborative working experiences, constructing my philosophy, theories and practices as an English teacher.

But this is not a thesis about the teaching of English, I simply draw my examples from that area which is my first hand experience, and I consider how my emerging thinking about postmodern, feminist pedagogies would make a difference to that context.

There is, however, one respect in which my experience of being an English teacher is significant for my writing of this text. This has to do with my approach to reading texts and ways of responding to them. Within the area of teaching texts, I have been very influenced by two significant theories: reader response, and deconstruction. From reader response theory I have learned to value the reader's response to text, and to understand that the reader is more active as a reader and learner when she questions and reacts to it, rather than when she slavishly seeks its true meaning, trying to drain it dry of every drop of significance. I understand also that in responding to text through writing I gain more by juxtaposing my experiences and thoughts with it, rather than by attempting to review its meaning and main points, as if such things were there waiting to be discovered. The strategies of
deconstruction contribute further to these concepts in the sense of helping to make the reader see how the reader of a text also becomes its author. We can never know as readers what the author’s ‘real’ meaning was. There is a danger in ascribing an ‘authorised’ reading to a text, as if it stood alone from its context, and as if the reader stood outside it contributing nothing of meaning to the reading. I understand that the best I can offer as a result of reading texts is a response, and a mingling of the new insights which I may have gained with my own workings on the ideas that are generated. There is no separate review of the text possible for me to give. It is mingled with my situation, my prior experience and my readiness for it at the time of reading.

In a similar way, partly given my experience as a teacher, partly given my way of reading ‘texts’ in the broader sense, my approach to writing the thesis is more of a literary one, than it is a social sciences approach. It is more a philosophical mingling of theory and practice, than it is an empirical, plus analysis and conclusion-drawing piece of writing. In this sense I recognise that it is an unusual approach for a Ph D in Education.

Reading Magda Lewis (1993) I felt a similarity with her in that we are both very experienced classroom teachers. The complexity of the questions she is asking about the classroom highlights for me that our, her and my, experience as teachers has taught us not to simplify the nature of a radical pedagogy such as one based in feminisms. I am struck by the extent of her experience as a teacher and its effect on her ability to analyse classroom events, how she is able to take time, switch strategies, and respond to subtle nuances. This is to do with the fact that as experienced teachers we have the timing to do these things, we have more choices to make and therefore to offer the students in our classes. I understand now that the refining of successful feminist pedagogies will be something that grows slowly in the experience of a classroom teacher. Now, over a long time, I have seen many examples of the consequences of feminist aspects of teaching, as a result of my own and some of my colleagues’ classes: for example, the intimacy that can build up in an all-women classroom, the resistances of many men and some women for such a wide range of complex reasons, the growing ‘feminist’ anger that sometimes emerges, and those things
which go beyond the class and begin to affect the women’s personal lives, as well as their professional concerns.

Education can be seen as a socialising, normalising, standardising force, offered as an opportunity for people to inherit ‘the culture and maintain standards’. Or it can be seen as a radical force offering steps towards autonomy, as a democratic activity which enables the learner as a participant to critique and interact with existing knowledges and to create different ways of reading, writing and knowing. Derrida, however, suggests that both projects with education are elusive and that teaching is an uncontrollable project. My experience indicates that if perhaps not totally uncontrollable, it can certainly be unpredictable. Consequently writing about it may not be a straight-forward, linear, logical, progressive process. “In the end linearity had to find a comfortable coexistence with the spiral of lived experience” (Lewis 1993, p15).

So, not solutions, but some decisions
In order to cope with some of the difficulties presented by the feminist focus of my topic, by my commitment to alternative and radical teaching and learning processes, and by the disrupting forces of postmodern ways of thinking, I have had to make some writer’s decisions and compromises in order to complete the project. They follow.

My approach to theory would demonstrate how I was learning to engage theoretical material with my practice, and that often the two would seem to have an ambivalent and ambiguous relationship which only a metaphorical approach would resolve. I would take from other theorists what I could deal with in the belief that the importance of theory is not its authoritative correctness, but the way in which we (I) are able to relate it and connect it to where we are currently positioned, in order to help us move on, or to challenge our moving.

It would also be anti-thetical to a postmodern way of writing to claim that the text of the thesis presents, or should attempt to present, a definitive perspective on the literature of the fields I have chosen to
look at - feminisms, critical pedagogy and classroom texts - first, they can only be a sample of texts which I have found in some way helpful, insightful, challenging or unsatisfactory. It is problematic to generalise from the writings of others, or to review them in the sense of 'representing accurately' what they are saying. And in a postmodern way of thinking, to assume that I had thoroughly or correctly reviewed them, 'got them under my belt' would be inappropriate. What I have attempted to do with the selective and selected literature I have listed is to acknowledge their contributions to my thinking - to pick out particularly helpful pieces for noting, notation, and to respond to them as far as they have intruded into my practice and thinking. The place at which their accumulated effect on my developing postmodern feminist pedagogy stopped and my own 'original' development took/takes over is impossible to mark. All I can state with clarity and certainty is that my pedagogy, my feminisms, my intellectual development are all irretrievably affected, 'advanced', enriched as a result of the intersection of other people's texts, my text, my practice and my reflections.

My way of writing would include different kinds of texts, which would make the 'authorship' of the text offered obvious. There is nothing neutral about it, the writing hand is there for the reader to witness. I am trying to offer an insight into my own thinking paths, and how they shifted, and what influenced them, and what different connections or disjunctions there were in some of the positions I had become interested in.

I would invite others (the readers) not to 'do it my way', but similarly to consider their positions, origins, routes through the teaching journey, and to review their own teaching in the light of their emerging, maybe in some cases new, perceptions of what they were trying to achieve, whatever their curriculum context was, whatever their constraints, ethics and strengths might be.

I would review my own practice, actions and assumptions in order to keep them alive, to keep them critical and practice-focused, and to articulate my newly formulated ideas as constant reminders and challenges to myself. Being a feminist teacher has to take place in the
context of the institutions we work in, as well as within the limitations and extensiveness of our own strengths and weaknesses. We can’t impose a model from outside, it needs to grow from within the situatedness of our practice, starting simultaneously with a developing theoretical knowledge and changing classroom practice. Thinking about teaching and learning, and actually changing classroom practice, are two very separate activities: how do we bring them together? Experience can be a starting point for politics, and a departure point for critical knowledge if it is used reflectively. I want to demonstrate the effect of mingling theory with practical situations, as an ongoing element of feminist pedagogies.

I realise now that I needed to shift from my original idea of wanting to ‘direct feminist teacher education’, in terms of coming up with a blueprint for a feminist pedagogy, to recognising the importance of self-responsibility in the process of teacher development.

We need more than shock-tactic strategies for liberating feminist pedagogy. It will be a careful, slow moving, considerate praxis, which allows all the participants in it time and space to select, rehearse, act, consider, critique and reflect. I have benefited in coming to this position by confronting the disturbing nature of postmodern thought. At times in this process I came face to face with what felt like the most extreme, relativist and nihilist-seeming ideas; and I felt paralysed, unable to take a practical course. Only after considerable effort was I able to re-collect my focus on what are the most important ethical and liberatory elements which feminist teachers need to pursue in order to change our practice. If there is anything that I do recommend with certainty and authority to anyone wishing to reconsider and develop their feminist pedagogy it would be to allow postmodern ways of thinking to challenge their certainties and ‘fundamental truths’ about feminisms and teaching, yet to hold on to a commitment as a feminist teacher that our very significant goal needs to be to teach and work for changed opportunities in the lives of girls and women.

All of this contributes to making feminist pedagogies constantly flexible, shifting, questioning, challenging praxis - more processes than prescriptions. This is what also makes it awkward, ambiguous, difficult
to work with, a constantly moving sea which may regularly make its cuts into established coast lines, and develop dangerous rips. I want to use some metaphorical writing in the thesis to explore this kind of thinking, to demonstrate how at times my own thinking was advanced when I left behind conventional academic texts and allowed myself to think in other kinds of language. It was this strategy which I found useful when I was immersed in the most difficult tangles of postmodern ways of thinking.

Becoming a feminist teacher, as I am living out the experience, is not linear and orderly. It has been at various stages put on hold while I lived out other aspects of my life. It is paralleled, sometimes separately, by my explorations of other complementary pedagogical theories. My experiences of becoming and still becoming a feminist teacher are not a then, and then, and then story, but a much more flimsy type of paper trail, that at times seem to have been blown away, or doubled back on itself. So the chapters of this thesis don’t follow a necessarily step by step demonstration of ‘the’ process, but are just one possible order, and they are interspersed with other texts to indicate that there are different ways of understanding and coming to these issues in the process of transforming oneself as a teacher and a politically-aware feminist.

Notes

1. For a significant discussion of this issue, see Giroux’s writing, in particular Henry Giroux (1992). *Border Crossings cultural workers and the politics of education* Routledge, New York, chapter 4 “Decentering the Canon”.

2. An example of the position of this group is contained in a new collection of their work, *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, (1996). edited by Diane Bell and Renate Klein, Spinifex, Melbourne, which puts their case compellingly. I intend to pursue this conflict of radical feminism and postmodern ways of thinking in relation to feminist pedagogy in future writing, seeking ways in which they can provide a productive tension for working out a creative feminist approach to teaching and learning.
Beginnings

The sea lies at the bottom of our hill. This morning I have been confronted, again, by my readings in various versions of post-structural theory and of critical theory (by Giroux, Kanpol, Lather, Hutcheon and Spivak, for example) of the perpetual intersections, connections, infinite locations and language constructions, of the politics and tensions, of the multiperspectives and variety of visions - ever partial and even so, altering all the time - that are inevitable factors to be considered in my attempt to write about a feminist pedagogy, to write "on good authority in the classroom".

How do I hold all this diversity, divergence, this complexity, in my head in order to describe a pedagogy which empowers girls as students in classrooms, which gives status to women teachers, which would enable us to see what a feminist teacher using feminist strategies, dealing with a feminist curriculum could achieve for girls (and boys) and their schooling? How do I describe it clearly enough to be of use to my own teaching, the teaching of my colleagues and friends, the future teaching of my students currently engaged in their pre-service training, without prescribing yet another 'regime of truth'? Is it possible, in a written text, to describe the possible teaching principles and practices and to capture the necessary fluidity, the ebb and flow of the teaching situation?

In panic I glance up and there is the sea still at the bottom of our hill. I know not to argue a thesis by analogy. However in the metaphor of the sea there lies some elements which parallel my philosophical position, my longing for a way to practise, and my understandings of language and meaning. Metaphor is not literal. It does not 'tell the truth'. It stands to shed light on, to point out a perspective. It works as allusion. It needs to be interpreted. Metaphor needs a both a writer and a reader to work on it.

I have lived on the hill above the sea for over eight years. What a dominating accompaniment it has been to my life. The sea has its causes, its origins, forces which work on it, to define it, contain it or stir it up. In addition it has its own inner dynamic which causes it to change, which in turn affects the external forces. The outer-inner origins and forces which influence the existence, shapes, sounds, colours of the sea are in perpetual, inevitable and infinite combinations.

The section of the Pacific Ocean which I live with has defined its shoreline in a particular way, though never a stable way, and it is in turn shaped and defined by the shoreline which results. In one section it smashes directly against impenetrable rock, in another it drifts slowly, gradually over ever changing sand flats.

The sea dredges up its flotsam and jetsam everyday in totally different arrangements, colours and textures. It alters (and has it altered) its colour, sounds,
rhythms and other effects every moment of the day. People seek out the sea. They endlessly require from it different experiences, and they bring to it their endlessly different experiences. They each stand in their own situations enveloped by their age, their class, their sexuality, their gender, their physical makeup - skin-type and physical fitness - their culture and spirituality. Each of these factors, and many others, in endlessly different variations influence how each person responds to the sea - takes from it, adds to it, engages with it. How the sea is, at any moment when they visit it, changes them one way or another.

On top of these immediate and individual situations are many other layers of possibility. For example, as a whole community we affect and interact with the sea. Wherever we build our roads and breakwaters, our houses and beach areas, we change it. The City Council has plans to completely re-design the sea front with new picnic spots, boating spaces, surfing areas, and a 'non-tidal' section. It is odd, the impudent desire of people to control a force such as the sea. I know thousands of years ago the whole area would have looked different from how it is now, and not just because of the modern settlement. In another set of thousands of years it will be completely different again.

What we often try to identify with in the sea is its rhythms and patterns. We learn enough to predict that in certain circumstances there will be some consequences. The different tides alternately cover and expose things, the wave movements and the texture of the sea gradually wear away things in a reasonably predictable pattern. Those who know the sea watch for the right combination of factors which make it suitable, 'the best', for their activity. In other words, given some knowledge of various factors, some careful observation of the current state of things, and the integrating of our own needs, situations and requirements, we can plan and execute a perfect day at the beach, though we will never be able to rely on it happening, or of it ever being the same again on another day.

What I experience of the sea at the bottom of our hill is such a tiny fragment of its huge existence, that in the scheme of things it is of little significance - except to me. It is how I live. It is a major force in how I experience the world and how I have chosen to shape my world to suit my needs, my visions and my lifestyle.

Obviously I could go on developing this metaphor of the sea at the bottom of our hill as a way of illuminating some of the significances, the difficulties, the infinite possibilities and perpetualities of what it is like to attempt to write about a feminist pedagogy which is being influenced, altered, constructed and deconstructed daily by my experiences as a teacher educator, as a citizen in a neo-conservative right wing western style democracy, as a mature Ph D student engaged with writers of poststructuralism, as a lesbian feminist, as a gardener, cook, joint house-owner of our home on the hill above the sea. I won’t however go any further with it, for now, though I may return to it from time to time.

What I feel I have done in writing this way, is to bring some sort of sense? or wholeness? Some sort of reconcilement among the many threads, complexities, contradictions and invigorating challenges that face me as I write. I have a need for structure, for developing strategies for change (after all, feminisms are looking for
changed conditions in the lives of women), the need to develop a vision of a 'better' future. This is similar to the need to plan for the fine day at the beach. But it is opposed to the another need I have to disrupt that plan, and to leave my 'day' open to possibilities. This need leads me to want to write in a transitory way about the possibilities, about partial understandings, about temporary ways of working which will leave the reader, and the student of feminist pedagogy, empowered to constitute their own collection of possible strategies for celebrating the achievements and differences among girls and women in education, for changing some of our concepts of what excellence might be, for getting rid of the inhibiting influence of patriarchy on the educational achievements of girls and women.

I feel that my metaphor may also be an indication to the reader of how to read this text, and how to deal with its possible meanings. Yes, I do want to suggest patterns, structures, scaffoldings, routines which other teachers can take and try. I want teachers to be able to take clearly expressed ideas and strategies which they can use. But I also think that there might be something gained by you, the reader, sitting beside me at the top of the hill, looking for an overview, but being immediately aware that there is not just one way to perceive a feminist pedagogy. The situation is changing all the time, as we interact with it, even as we simply sit and look, and think about it.

The worst we could do is to settle into a particular regime of feminist teaching, into habitual strategies, attitudes, values and expectations. After all I chose to live by the moving turbulent, ebbing and flowing sea, not by a still-life, still-birth-death image of it.
Chapter One

Reviewing the Feminist Lessons

When women want to escape from exploitation, they do not merely destroy a few ‘prejudices’, they disrupt the entire order of dominant values.

- Luce Irigaray This Sex Which Is Not One

Most women have not chosen their biology. We have all participated in constructing our gender. Some of us have decided to take the name feminist to identify at least a minimum awareness that as women, within the dominant domain of patriarchy, we have been defined as ‘other’ against the norm of men. We take the title of feminist (shifting from the passive into the active) which locates us outside the dominant discourse and symbolises that we are challenging the prevailing notions about who women are and how we are defined, about what our nature is, and about what our talents and natural inclinations might be. If I say I am a feminist, and I do, I place myself in an alliance with other feminists who are seeking to destabilise the structures established to maintain the dominant power of men. As I join other women in shaking the foundations on which men have built their empires I am claiming recognition for the view that the dominance of men in the domestic, public, economic, cultural and scientific arenas is a constructed position, not a natural or genetic inevitability.

The alliance with other feminists, within which I place myself, is by no means a simple, or even a comfortable one. Feminists have created not one theoretical framework to define a feminism, but many frameworks representing the diverse locations, identifications, and experiences of the women who belong under feminist umbrellas. However, I want to argue that it is important that this is not seen as some loose alliance, not as merely a relativistic, momentary, arbitrary conglomerate. Rather, the different feminisms represent the diverse locations of different women’s experiences as they/we develop ways of confronting and changing some of the aspects of patriarchy which most constrain their freedoms and inhibit their various
potentials to construct clear pathways towards their (my) own sense of agency. Whatever the particularities of their (our) situations a common factor for feminists is that "our patience has worn thin" (Phillips in Barrett & Phillips 1992, p11). We all want, however differently, to work to bring about changes in the lives and the experiences of the women we know, and to support to the extent that we are able other feminists working within their own constraints and constructs.

In this first chapter I am attempting to present my own understanding of where feminism has come to since the start of its second wave nearly thirty years ago, to reflect on my positioning as a feminist influenced by postmodern thinking, and to consider the significance of feminist analysis for the experiences of girls and women within educational structures.

The advantage for me living in the second half of the 90s is that I can look back over the various paths which the second wave of feminisms has taken and appreciate what each has contributed to the movement which still has a sense of social responsibility and desires change, albeit different kinds of change, in the lives of women. With my heart and my emotions I can enjoy many of the strategies which have given us cause to celebrate and encourage each other: the pleasures of sharing common experiences; the reclaiming of women’s voices and achievements; the united campaigns for equal pay, education, participation in public life; the celebration of lesbian loving. I can recall the sense of satisfaction as legislation changed, as doors opened into employment opportunities or leisure pursuits previously kept for men. I remember the vital role of consciousness-raising groups and the energy they generated to help change many women’s self-perceptions.

Looking back on those years I can also see that many women missed out on such experiences. I can see that the often heart-filling experiences of women’s conventions, film festivals, therapy sessions and other interest groups were usually more available to white and middle class women. I am now more aware of how what seemed like great steps forward to me, meant little to women of different cultures or from under-privileged socio-economic backgrounds. I can see that what we often essentialised as ‘women’s experience’ applied to relatively few of us. It seemed very significant to articulate what we saw at the time as common to us all because those of us from different groups and backgrounds did not know
each other very well, and we needed to meet on common ground in order to understand how different we were. What we probably needed instead of a common conscience was a community consciousness, a collective of interactive feminist communities (Kanpol 1992).

The exuberance of the heart-filled years became more sober as cultural politics, sexual politics, and economic politics emerged to challenge feminists. That period in the seventies when feminists looked for essential, identifying common features - women’s experience, women’s voice, women’s writing, women’s spirituality, women’s space - has had to be re-examined and deconstructed to acknowledge the myriad situations, and diversities of women throughout the different cultures and economies of the world. We have had to change from a focus on the essentialist theories of unified ‘women’s ways’ of being and knowing, in order to face our diversity and discover how to use it. Many a conference or feminist studies classroom has ended in tears during the process. Many an anti-feminist group has taken advantage of the apparent fragmentation of the feminist movement to launch backlash attacks.

But what for me is worth celebrating is that feminists have not dodged the issues that diversity and difference have thrown up for us. Postmodern theory which looked as though it might shake feminists irrevocably from their platforms has been confronted. It has not been the cause of cynicism and despair among feminists. We are beginning to turn its challenges about the search for women’s identity, or finding a woman’s voice, consciousness-raising or political correctness, into critical and reflective feminist theories of heterogeneity as well as into strategic alliances and coalitions in order to pursue common agendas, and to provide helpful support across differences. In my view there is among feminists a commitment to the sense that we still have a long way to go in order to secure our visions of better and different futures for ourselves and for the generations of women to come because across cultural, sexual, religious and economic differences the oppression of women politically, professionally and personally is still tangible in all our lives. Different but tangible.

Feminist women’s commitment to tangible experiences in our private, public, professional and political lives is part of our strength as a group working for change. Having been enculturated to value our private,
domestic experiences, women are less inclined to leave them behind when we move out into public, professional or political arenas. In fact we work consciously to not separate out these different spheres of our lives. Patricia Mann (1994) demonstrates a difference in the histories of men and women as they have moved out beyond the home into public workplaces. For men it meant going out daily to work, leaving their women behind to care for the domestic scene. More recently as women have moved outside the home to work, they left no-one at home to take care of things. So they took with them, into outside paid employment, the concerns and cares of home. Before they planned their work days, they had to plan the care needed for the home. The significance of this is that women bring with them, rather than leave behind, many of the concerns, behaviours, ways of relating and habits of domestic life. While I acknowledge that I am over-generalising here it is nevertheless noticeable that the workplaces in which women dominate, at least numerically, are ones in which womanly characteristics such as nurturing, holistic skills, collaboration, and affection are said to be more in evidence. There has been recent comment that as they move in equal numbers into the legal profession women lawyers and judges are bringing changes not only to the behaviours of courtrooms, but also to the ways in which the law is applied and the ways in which cases and decisions are written up.1 It was precisely for these nurturing characteristics that women were admitted in large numbers to the teaching profession. This is developed more fully in chapter 8, A Woman’s True Profession....

_Yearning_ by bell hooks (1991) is a collection of essays which provides a cultural critique of many aspects of the educational racism and sexism of our postmodern society. In the first essay hooks explains that her choice for the title of the collection is an outcome of her feeling that the issues which concern her, affect her emotionally and passionately as well as politically and intellectually. She speaks of the need to develop a critical theory and a liberatory pedagogy which will withstand the inquisition of the academy. Of equal importance, she argues, is that the origin of such theory lies in her lived experience, and it is urged out of her by a ‘yearning’ for life without racism, without sexism. For all the intellectual and theoretical components of her work, it would not mean as much to her if it did not have a tangible connection to her life and her experiences.
As I attempt a feminist critique of current pedagogical theory, and consider ways to construct feminist frameworks for teaching and learning, I am aware that I am similarly motivated by both affective and intellectual desires. Where these desires or yearnings for tangible changes in classrooms overlap with a feminist perspective on educational theories will be the heart of my emerging feminist pedagogy, and the opportunities for new emerging praxis. Intellectual rigour will be necessary to sustain the investigation of the discourses, the analyses and critique. But, as a feminist my approach to this task will acknowledge the whole, connected and conscious person. Emancipatory, feminist pedagogy rests on a commitment to a holistic vision capable of being made tangible within different classroom situations.

Finding a voice of difference
Feminist pedagogy begins with a commitment to make differences in the educational experiences of girls. This will not be a matter of merely softening with a ‘woman’s touch’ the environment of classrooms. The effect of feminist action within schools will be to shatter, to “disrupt the entire order of dominant values...” (Irigaray 1985, p29). When feminists claim that they are committed to making differences, they are claiming a right to take up positions which propose alternative ways of working and alternative visions for the future; alternatives that is to the dominance of patriarchy. They/we as feminists, are not seeking equality within a monopoly, but difference within a pluralistic number of possibilities. Sometimes, as Jane Flax (1990) points out, this notion has become so complex that we as feminists have sought to find commonalities in order to muster sufficient numbers to achieve important changes. We have had to develop a sense of social responsibility and acquire a higher public profile for the feminist agenda in our pursuit of change within education.

Women have played an enormously important part in the education of young people ever since significant numbers of the population of children were sent to school by government legislation. But the traditional feminine involvement in education has been of a very specific nature. Women have been the 'doers', the practitioners, but not the thinkers. We have been allowed to be active in classrooms, but not encouraged to be intellectuals. We have participated in the carrying out of the teaching but been omitted
from the construction of it. We have followed but not taken the theoretical initiatives. (See also Smith 1987, p18 - 19.)

More women teachers have been trained than men. (For example, in New Zealand in 1995, of the students enrolled in teacher education, 2,305 were men, and 10,340 were women.) We have had access to the academic circles of teacher education through our training, but until recent years we have limited its use to pursue the practical part of the job in the classroom, rather than take up the possibilities of an academic career in educational theory and research. It may look as though we have ‘chosen’ this way, to be practitioners rather than theorists. In pre-feminist times it would have been mutually agreed that classroom teaching was natural work for women, but the management side and the serious intellectual work of education was the domain of men. It was feminist theoretical perspectives which demonstrated to us how little real choice women had about such things. Adrienne Rich (1979) for example encouraged women to become active in their claiming of rights, choices and options in education. We would not make progress just by being within education, she argued, we had to make new active choices if we were to make progress.

It is obvious that women have not had access to the administrative positions in education, even after twenty years of emphasis on provision of equal opportunities we still have nowhere near the proportion of management positions which should be our right. Women make up only one quarter of the principals in New Zealand primary schools, and 18% of the principals in secondary schools. In New Zealand Colleges of Education women make up two thirds of the total teaching staff, yet two thirds of the senior lecturer and management staff are men (“Education Trends Report” 1996, Ministry of Education, Wellington). We are also still less likely to be in the positions which have access to conceptual decision making (Delamont 1989). We have not gained senior positions in the academy, nor in the policy and curriculum areas of departments of education. Men have dominated curriculum and assessment development.

Women have been allowed into education, given passage through it as teachers and as learners, but we do not own the educational discourse. It is spoken, for us and about us, by men. Women have traditionally been undervalued as thinkers and speakers, “(w)omen’s words carry much less
status than do men's" (Delamont 1989). Women teachers have used and applied the discourses of different educational theories, but they have not owned it.

Patriarchal ideology has done enormous damage to women, with its sets of limitations and labels for women, its restrictive set of expectations for women. Of course in developing its competitive cult it has caused damage to everyone, even those to whom it has allowed power. One of the great difficulties that it has created for women over centuries of seeking emancipation is a distrust for the voices of our own sex. We have not seen and heard each other in positions of authority or high public esteem. We have had to depend on men for authoritative words and action. Women who dared to contravene the accepted codes were perceived as different, unusual, unnatural even. Consequently although we have traditionally had many women teaching and being busy within education, we have not become used to allowing them to speak with authority in the discourse. And so we have been prevented from experiencing the impact of women educators teaching feminist curricular with a feminist pedagogy, using feminist methodologies.

Perhaps I shouldn't be at all surprised by this when I look at education in the context of general social conditions. The authorities who speak about sociology, about politics and economics, about religion or psychology, about management, about philosophy, and about child development, all of which are disciplines related to education, are predominantly men who have assumed a male perspective. (For example see Waring 1988, or Abbott and Wallace 1990.) After all even the first public discussions of women's rights, as far as we know were by men (Bryson 1992). They work within a discourse or conceptual framework which has its own logic and accepted ways of thinking, its commonly assumed understandings and ways of speaking and writing texts.

What has happened to women and girls in education cannot be separated from what has happened to us in other areas of society, both academic and non-academic. It is in fact a reflection of the wider context of patriarchal domination. The status of women has been constructed as inferior to that of men and maintained as such through the complex development of gendered identities. These gendered constructions have required, for example,
women's voices to be gentler, lower, sweeter than men's. The impact of such ideas has been more serious than merely ensuring the softness and pleasantness of women's voices, it has led to lessening the significance of what we actually say, no matter how forcefully we say it. We need not think that these are past habits of long gone eras. Research, as well as the popular media, tells us that when women achieve management status, men prefer and accept more easily the woman manager who uses a hesitant manner, (Whitaker and Hein 1991) and a 'suggestive' tone, rather than an assertive or authoritative tone. A feminist pedagogy has to address these issues and open up ways for women to be able to explore their own ways of being authoritative.

The preferred physical images of women in the media continue to promote thinner figures, and emphasise our sexuality. The fashion stages show women in costumes designed largely by men, and worn by women for men, which reveal more and more of the woman's body, including the 'parts' which supposedly tempt men the most to respond with sexual aggression. Official pornography (as distinct from fashion shows and beauty competitions which are not regarded officially as pornography) more than simply revealing the woman's body, shows her in deliberate poses of humiliation, pain, and degradation, yet 'wanting it', from a man. All these images are readily available to men and women, to young men and young women, shaping their expectations and self concepts.

A young woman is expected at the same time both to conform to these fashion and sexual images, and also to remain 'above' them, or she will deserve what she gets. There are many restrictive codes operating for women which do not operate for men. The fact that advertising, a very costly business, continues to present women as dressed up to attract men, or exposed to seduce them, implies that men are actively seeking such images. If this kind of advertising was not working it would not continue to be presented on our screens and radios, or in our newspapers. Men are being educated, and granted permission to respond to images which degrade women, and to treat them accordingly.

Men are the way things are. Women are the 'other'. Their role is to be what men want, to be the posers, victims, responders, acceptors. Men are the actors, the makers of the play. Male social dominance of women is about the
removal of female choice and voice; it is about body control; it is about men's leadership and the rites of (rights to?) initiation. And it is acceptable. These discursive structures, if they are to be disrupted, require more than celebrating an occasional individual woman who succeeds in being promoted within an institution, or some newspaper articles about a few women who successfully live on their own or with each other. They require structural changes which can only emerge from a combination of feminist and postmodern critique of the hegemonic male ideology and practice. The critique needs to be taught and applied within schools, so that children grow up exposed to thinking counter to the dominant patriarchal ideology. The development of such counter critical theory is an essential part of changing people's beliefs and behaviours, because the dominant patriarchal ideology has been so influential up until now in controlling current social practice. As Apple (1988) points out theory is not merely ideas, it is a paradigm within which practice can be created. A discourse is not only language, it also creates the meanings that language takes on.

Learning to speak
A feminist critique will examine the way that patriarchy has been established by an ideology which allows men to situate themselves dominantly, and place women in a more passive role, closer to 'nature'. Ideology is a term which describes a view of the world, or a set of ideas, which has become accepted as 'common sense', as the way things are. When an ideology is so entrenched that the way it operates is seen as the natural order of things, it is clear that the majority of the participants in it have become complicit in its systems. Not to be complicit is very difficult, it means attempting to shatter what is accepted as universal meaning. Male ideology has allowed the development of a set of arguments which asserts that the superiority of men over women is in the natural way of things. It has constructed (that is, made up a way of being for) women as: physically weaker; constrained by their biological child-bearing function; needing to be admired for their looks and power to attract; having gentler natures than men; and deserving to be honoured and protected as long as they keep within their designated spheres (Whelehan 1995, p16 and pp 81-2). This could be summed up as an expectation that they should not be distracted from their 'natural' functions as mothers and nurturers.
In order to protect their position men have developed some key strategies which affect the experiences of women in both actual and symbolic ways. Some of the more significant of these are the use of fear; the use of a louder voice; the use of greater strength; and the use of patronage. It is the fact that these strategies impinge on the lives of so many women across cultures and class and sexual identity that feminists in the sixties, seventies and early eighties combined in their analysis and critique of patriarchy. The aim was to draw women together in vast numbers, in order to expose the oppressed nature of our situation and demand change in both the public and personal spheres of our lives. 3.

Most men are stronger than most women, which makes it easier for women to be physically overpowered by men and vulnerable to rape. This is the physical fear with which men are able to threaten women. It is also possible to create fear in women by threatening them with verbal abuse which might accuse them of being overly sexually active and assertive: 'loose', slag, whore, easy; or they could be accused of being under sexually active, old maid, frigid, dried up, needing a good fuck; or they could be called into suspicion of being lesbian, dyke, man-hater, queer. Young women in school yards and classrooms are constantly exposed to hearing about themselves in this kind of language.

Such fears operate to encourage women to be more compliant, to make sure that we please men rather than anger them and run the risk of physical, emotional and linguistic abuse. They also can alienate women from each other and prevent alliances developing in the oppressed group. Alliances are extremely important defence strategies for any oppressed group. In the case of women our numbers are so great that united we could provide substantial opposition to the prevailing male hegemony. But if the numbers are fragmented because women compete with each other either out of fear or to attract and please men, then they count as if for nothing. If this fragmentation was not sustained the power of united women would be sufficiently strong to threaten the dominance of patriarchy, and to bring about a change in the current imbalance which is maintained through the use of fear.

Most men have louder and stronger voices than most women, in spite of the curious myth that we talk all the time. Women gossip, women tittle-tattle,
women chatter! The discursive practices of the patriarchy “situate some voices as authoritative and worthy of attention and respect and marginalise or silence others” (Flax 1993, p40). In public occasions, teaching situations and personal interactions men tend to speak more than women. Women do more listening (Spender 1980).

The effect of speaking more, and more loudly, is to give to men ownership and control of the discourses, to give them more practice than we get, for example, at talking through ideas, at hearing themselves thinking aloud. It gives them more chance of being known, being recognised, being seen to have ideas and take leadership. They are more likely to be heard and so assume more authority through their voices. People, particularly students, politicians, and women all listen more to men and have learnt to take their words as more important because they sound more assured. The specific sound that men make is then constructed to be the authoritative one, and women’s sound is the other one, the deviant, not the normal one. It is commonly raised as a criticism of women teachers that they do not sound authoritative enough, because they are being judged against the male norm for authoritative voice. No wonder so few make it through to principal levels within schools. (See also Smith 1987, p17 - 43.)

Most men know how to use their strength, most women do not. As women we are not trained to use the strength that we have; we are also trained not to use it. The prevailing ideology overtly encouraged is for women to be gentler, weaker and less physical. This is how we are trained not to use our strength. The strength of women is not developed.

But even more serious, because of the way it leaves us helpless and vulnerable, is that we are not initiated into ways of maximising the strength we do have. The brotherhood of men and boys in garages, workshops, gymnasiums, and through apprenticeships has no equivalent in women’s spheres. Much of the advantage men have over women is ways of knowing how to enhance or complement their natural physical powers. A relatively small number of women who do self-defence courses, or who gain a rare admittance to an apprenticeship are let into the secrets, the tricks of the trades, and develop the skills which enable them to overcome larger forces, or shift greater weights than they realised was possible. They are taught for example, simple methods of leverage, they are shown ways to take
advantage of vulnerable positions and effective grips. But even now that girls are admitted to workshop technology in schools they rarely go on to advanced levels, and they even more rarely are taught by women teachers.

The effect of keeping from us such common ‘brotherly knowledge’ is to keep women dependent and restricted in movement. We are inhibited from free access in cities and countrysides, we have to ask a ‘strong man’ to do all sorts of tasks for us, and then we have to be grateful for the protection or the help. We learn to despise our frailty and at the same time we are encouraged to maintain it. We accept that ‘we are weak, but he is strong’.

Men control a phenomenal proportion of the wealth and resources of the world, and rarely count the work or contribution of women in economic terms (Waring 1988). This gives men, at least a certain group of them, control of the financial, environmental, artistic, scientific and educational resources which the world has to offer. In most Western countries women have rights of ownership and the power to disperse our own property, but since it is such a small proportion of the total, in the end there is no hope of buying our way to power.

Patronage is the ability to control because of superior position and wealth, the ability to buy what you want, to command service from others. You are able to dispense kindness and ‘favours’, but you hold the power. Those who are selected for patronage are fortunate, in that they will gain support and help for what they want to achieve. Of course they need to persuade or impress the patron, and they must serve and please. Within the context of the contract or patronage they have an independence about how they do their work, but in the end it is owned by the patron. He is the purchaser, it is his to dispense and control.

The effect of men’s ownership of most of the world’s goods and resources is to give them control over the lives of women (Jaggar in Whelehan 1995, p 62). For women, it means we take what we are given and manage it within certain limits. The most spectacular manifestation of this is the ‘common sense’ decision, now accepted as natural, that the work women do within the domestic sphere should be unpaid. The domestication and feminisation of the world of home, and then the creation of it as a space in which the work done is unpaid for was a truly masterful decision (Waring 1988). It has
left the women working in the home in the status of the patronised. If the patron likes the work, is satisfied, sees that it fulfils his needs, he will reward it. But it is entirely at his whim.

**Learning from feminists’ revisions**
The expectations for change which emerge from a feminist critique of the situation of women within a patriarchal society are enormous. What is required is not merely a minor facelift to a slightly crumbling facade, but the dismantling of the whole structure. The re-building process has to begin again, and not merely to a new plan but with a whole new praxis. “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984, p112). Maybe, separate buildings will be needed, maybe just one completely new structure. The plans are only in the process of being drawn up. Working to re-build the structures will require enormous effort by women, and it is we who will have to do the work. We can not expect any help from the ‘masters’. Feminist teachers battle very hard to check that the spending of school resources is dispensed evenly among girls and boys, and in spite of changes taking place for women in terms of gaining promotion within schools, the average salary of women teachers is still well below that of men. (In 1995 according to New Zealand Ministry of Education figures the mean salary of state school secondary women teachers was $41,160, and for men it was $43,731. “Education Trends Report”, 1996, Ministry of Education, Wellington.)

This kind of analysis of the establishment and dominance of patriarchy draws on modernist modes of thinking. Early feminist critique of patriarchy was also developed as a paradigm of modernity. Both the patriarchal ideology and the feminist critique developed within the modernist discourse, accept certain generalised premises and universalise them. In the case of patriarchy ‘man’ had come to mean ‘human’. The feminist critique developed as women revised arguments which gave validity to the positions in which they were situated by patriarchal ideology, and as they acknowledged the extent to which they were oppressed by them. The recognition was transformed into action when groups of women collected together to share common experiences and to devise ways of acting collectively for changes.
However these collective experiences in drawing women closely together to pursue changes and reforms also revealed differences among women, not just in the sense of the liberal notion of 'individual difference', but significant and difficult differences, differences which spring from layers of multiple positions and locations which make up women's relationships with the people and the structures around them. We all have different relational, economic, cultural, and sexual commitments floating across both our personal and public lives. As feminists recognised this and began to draw on it in their theoretical work, they anticipated and began to engage in postmodern debate. As a result a modernist, positivist, reformist commitment to a single feminist agenda became impossible to sustain; though in attempting to work out what serves women best, we do from time to time need to make use of reformist strategies. An example might be in terms of salary negotiations where most feminists would work in a reformist way towards equal pay, rather than advocate for differential pay rates.

Radical feminism which urges women to come out of the institutions, and to not collaborate with men on any level has done much pathfinding work for women. But along with the many other alternative minority women's and feminist groups it has largely left the major institutionalised forums, such as education, untouched. I am not meaning to criticise the work of radical feminists, nor that of small, alternative special interest groups, because their contribution to the theoretical and imagined possibilities for women, and their broadening of feminist visions has been enormous. What I want to acknowledge along side that work is the contribution of feminists who have worked within institutions for change. What I want to reflect on is the difficulty and ambiguity, the theoretical and strategic challenges which feminists face when they continue to function within the monolithic institutions of patriarchy.

The modernist and often essentialist feminist theory has proved enormously useful in establishing a place for a feminist agenda within prevailing institutional constructions. What it enabled women to do was to challenge the hegemonic assumptions of patriarchy on a broad scale. Feminists challenged the ideology within education that had either treated women and girls as inferior, or completely ignored that their needs were different from those of men and boys. Feminist research recorded the lack of attention
given by teachers to girls' behaviours. This lack of attention to girls was so pervasive that it was almost as if girls didn't have behaviours in the classroom! Prior to such research women teachers and academics believed that they should speak an impersonal language, and behave as if being a woman had nothing to do with their professional lives (Pagano 1990). The essentialist feminist research also noted the absence of women's achievements or interests in the curriculum. Feminist teachers and researchers began to write about 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky et al. 1986), and to develop pedagogical strategies which acknowledged the different kinds of learning experiences which girls demonstrated suited them. Such feminist activity was significant for the way it politicised the classroom in relation to gender issues. It added to the work being done in the area of education and social class, which also called into question the hegemonic assumptions of educational theory and practice (Lawton 1975, for example).

Although the postmodern influence has problematised essentialist diagnoses and approaches to the classroom, there can be no denying the way in which feminist research of the 1970s and early 80s transformed the educational agenda, (for example: Walkerdine 1981 & 1985; Spender 1982; Spender and Sara, 1980; Gilligan 1982; Grumet 1988; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarul, 1986.) Then there was the research in the area of curriculum, (Beer 1974; Showalter 1977; Moers 1977; Davies 1989; Kennedy (ed) 1981; Towns 1984; Scraton 1986). From such work emerged equality legislation, affirmative action programmes, changes to curriculum choices and career advice, sexual harassment policies, monitoring of funding distributions, monitoring of promotion opportunities for women, and many other school policies and practices which have seen major curriculum change, and the achievement levels of girls in non-traditional subject areas rise enormously.

As the 1980s continued into the 1990s, feminist teachers and researchers began to take account of two other major theoretical areas. They were critical or radical pedagogy, and postmodernism. This process has not been one way however. Many of the developers of critical pedagogy acknowledge their debt to feminist theories (Lather 1991; Stanley 1992; and Giroux 1992). And there is also acknowledgement that feminism added a great deal to the development, if not took the lead, in developing 'difference
theories'. I deal more fully with the ways in which these other theoretical developments related to feminisms' concerns about pedagogy in chapters 3 and 4.

In attempting to meet these challenges feminism underwent enormous theoretical changes, which will emerge in the chapter 3. But it also clung to its political and reformist agenda with the two often being experienced as in conflict with each other. The dilemmas emerging from the conflict are the main focus of this thesis as I work between a theory of feminist pedagogy and the nature of feminist classroom praxis. They, the dilemmas, have resulted in a process which is very unsettling, not in an intellectual and imaginative sense, but in the sense that I had approached the project of writing about a feminist pedagogy from the perspective of setting out to define a set of practices which would transform the classroom for girls and for feminist teachers, and that has proved to be impossible to do. I have been able to explore aspects of feminist pedagogy, but not to the extent of being able to define it once and for all. Jane Flax says that we are living in communities where events have made it difficult to believe in, even to desire, order, continuity and stability (Flax 1993, p47). The work that I have done in preparing this text has meant that my faith in modernist, traditional notions of humanity making rational progress towards an improved kind of living has been shattered. Those who have made such claims of themselves have so often proved to be full of double standards, brutality, and personal greed. What men call progress has often caused so much harm.

So, in embarking on a feminist process to change the nature of teaching and learning in classrooms, and on an attempt to reduce the amount of injustice for girls in the system, I have learned that I cannot offer transcendental guarantees and solutions, nor can I assume that I possess some "wistful political innocence" (ibid p53) about the ways to improve feminists' teaching. The material which follows represents my efforts to grapple with the complexities of the classroom, of feminisms and postmodernism, to examine my own praxis, and to open up some processes which other feminist teachers might find useful to explore in the context of their own classroom work.
Notes

1. An article in *Quote Unquote*, May 1996, discusses women lawyers, the first women judges and possible differences in legal thought and expression between the sexes. 'Poritia Faces Life' by Bernard Brown.

2. This information was supplied by the Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

Chapter Two

Feminisms Find Allies

I have thus attempted to define the basis for what I see as a pedagogy of possibility, one committed to the expansion of the range of human capacities contained within the requirements of securing diversity, compassionate justice, and the renewal of life.
- Roger I Simon Teaching Against the Grain

New circumstances,... do not necessarily evoke a new pedagogy. Outdated remedies may simply be applied with new vigour. Sometimes, however, new practices are invented to bring schooling more into line with new social priorities.... Thus, among other things, new pedagogic practices embrace new visions of society, new images of teaching and learning, and ... new conceptions of educational management.
- David Hamilton Towards a Theory of Schooling

Feminism demands extensive changes within education, in all of its aspects, from funding to personal interactions within the classroom. Feminists have looked at different types of changes to help improve the education of girls and women: from what the purpose of girls' education should be, to changing the curriculum, to aspects of sexism within classrooms, to the role of the woman teacher within institutions and within classrooms. But in some cases feminists have claimed, almost as if their own discoveries, credit for certain classroom activities which other radical pedagogies have also been developing and using. In our work towards developing transformative pedagogy we need to acknowledge the work of other educationalists who are also attempting as David Hamilton (above) says, new pedagogical practices which embrace new visions of society. Feminist educators need to work on forging alliances with other sympathetic educators, so that we can jointly work towards the changes
we espouse. There are for example, likely to be allies for a feminist pedagogy within Women's Studies, as well as with those associated with critical or radical pedagogies who are seeking to challenge conventional notions of the aims and methodologies of traditional educational practice.

This chapter will consider how feminist teachers need to make use of these allies, whilst also engaging in constant monitoring of their limitations. To some extent such considerations sit more within the framework of a modernist approach to issues. That is, I am working with an assumption that it is possible, progressively, to bring about an improving educational environment in which the needs of learners are better addressed, where teachers can create learning environments which lead to more independence and critical awareness, where oppressive ideologies are identified and challenged. Modernist practice arises out of a rational commitment to the possibility that we can make progressive improvements to ourselves, our societies, our environments. These improvements will have emerged from liberal and emancipatory notions of what constitutes progress and development. Teachers with a commitment to liberatory pedagogy, myself included, do feel an affinity with such ideas, particularly when it comes to taking practical decisions about improving our classroom practice. This chapter is a pragmatic and strategic search for ways in which feminists can benefit from epistemological and praxis links with like-minded colleagues. But it will also remain clear about the particular differences that feminisms will want to make to our education systems. And the implications of postmodern ways of thinking for such a pragmatic and strategic search will lurk near the surface, and will emerge to disturb it more as the thesis proceeds.

First, I will consider some of the components of feminists' agendas for change in education, and how these have shifted over time. Feminism attempts to examine all aspects of women's lives but as many feminists have concluded, Kate Millett (1969), Rich (1979), and Spender and Sarah (1980) among them, education has always been a priority. Of all the public demands that women have made in our quest for equality, access to education has been one of the most persistent and universal.

The women's voice in support of education for girls has not always been united, though it has been long. Different types of education have been
proposed for women, different reasons developed to justify them, different points at which people have become satisfied with what had been achieved. However as Sara Delamont (1989) has argued, in all cases the feminist critique of what counts as education for girls and women shows that it must be, even today, changed. Not all that long ago, within this century, it was obvious that women’s education made progress only as long as the family was not threatened. We may have come a long way since it was believed that women’s bodies and brains would suffer from the strain of education but there is still evidence that some areas of learning and training are not considered as ‘suitable’ for girls, engineering stands out. Recent correspondence in The Press (Christchurch) regarding the suitability of encouraging girls into engineering continued over several days, demonstrating that the editor still considered it a topic worthy of debate. Such perceptions continue to affect women’s educational choices and aspirations.

Feminism’s impact on education has taken various forms, both direct and indirect. Some broad sweeping changes in society’s attitudes towards women have filtered through into schooling. Shifts in language reflect some of these changes, making it harder for people to ‘get away with’ sexist language of both the sexual kind, and the language which plays on stereotypes. Most educational institutions now have anti-sexist language policies, anti-harassment policies, and have to account through equal opportunities policies for the employment and promotion of women in the workforce. These shifts are supported by changes in some aspects of the images of women projected through various texts, visual, written, and oral, giving girls the opportunity to see a wider range of possible options being accepted as suitable for women. Unfortunately these are seriously undermined by the continued availability of pornographic images, and the dress and appearance images of the fashion world geared to emphasise the sexual and fragile sides of women’s ‘natures’.

Because of the changes that feminism has brought to thinking about marriage, family life, parenting, housekeeping and finances, schools have responded by changing approaches to the teaching of many areas of the curriculum such as design for living courses, technology, economics, social sciences, careers and guidance counselling. This has been enhanced by specific government legislation which permitted: conditions of service
negotiated by the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association in 1989 giving service and salary credits to teachers in recognition of time spent in childcare; the abolition of corporal punishment in 1989, which was a policy fiercely pursued by feminist teachers in New Zealand (Auckland Feminist Teachers, Issue 32, June 1989); the introduction of a requirement in the 1988 State Sector Act that employing authorities have an equal opportunities programme; the decision by the Department of Education in New Zealand to create specially designated positions as education and curriculum officers for girls and women, and the establishment of the Women's Advisory Council on Education, 1986. Pay equity legislation was also briefly introduced in 1989, only to be overturned in 1990 by the newly elected National government.

In turning their attention to the academies feminists confronted a range of quite different issues and have gone about dealing with them in various ways. Virginia Woolf was convinced that women needed a completely different kind of education from the one men received, a teaching which developed the arts of human discourse and of understanding other people's lives and minds. She believed that the hierarchical basis of the male education system failed to protect intellectual liberty. She did not consider it appropriate for men either since, as she argued in Three Guineas, (1938) it failed to protect society from war. In fact Woolf saw the competitive and combative nature of education actually encouraging war-like thinking, and valorising the achievements of war. She believed that women should not emulate such a system, but establish their own, based on a completely different, 'woman's way' of looking at the world. Hélène Cixous (in Sellers ed 1988) argues that biological differences between men and women give rise to different bodily experiences and thus create different sources of knowledge, different perceptions and therefore potential for different ways of knowing.

Delamont (1989) argues that in retrospect, looking at how schooling for girls was established, those who argued for girls' schooling to be the same as boys were right. She says that if it was established as different from that of boys and men, because of the association with the inferior gender, it too would be regarded as inferior. However what she then goes on to advocate is the idea of the same system for both girls and boys, but a different basis for it. She says that education is a culture, not a system, and that it is
governed by traditions not rules. Since it lacks the permanence of being ordained, it can as she says, in “glacially slow” fashion, be changed.

During the 1970s and early 80s there was a proliferation of material, conference papers and publications focussed on the question of how schooling was educating girls. The wording in the titles of many of these encapsulated the concerns of the feminist educators who were producing them: “Learning to Lose”, “Invisible Women - the schooling scandal”, “And Jill Came Tumbling After”, “Just Like a Girl - how girls learn to be women”.

Data gathering and ethnographic research produced valuable material for the feminist argument that although in democratic societies such as New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA, education claimed to be available and for the benefit of all students, in fact girls were not receiving their fair share, not of teacher attention, not of representation in texts, not in the content of the taught curriculum, not in access to all the cultural capital of the hidden curriculum (for example, Spender and Sarah eds 1980). The feminist report card to education was that schools could do better, if they tried.

It was important that this information came to light not just to draw the attention of policy developers, educational administrators, teachers and parents, but also so that individual girls in classrooms were given tangible evidence that their experiences of being overlooked and left out of classroom talk and practical activities, just two examples, were both real, and, not their own fault. Systemically they were being disadvantaged. It was consciousness-raising material, which shifted the responsibility for changing the structures and the systems, the culture of education, from individual girls and women to those politically and educationally in charge.

At the same time that this classroom-based research evidence was emerging, Women’s Studies courses were being established in the tertiary institutions. These ranged from the new outlook, self-esteem and confidence-building ‘transition from home to work’ courses which many Polytechnics offered, to academic courses largely focussed on re-discovering women’s work and contribution in history (herstory), art,
literature (‘a literature of their own’), science and other disciplines. The established canons and epistemologies were examined for their gaps, their silences, and re-examined in feminist terms for the implications of their content and partiality. Feminist academics in the sociology and psychology disciplines worked on questioning the hegemony of the ‘malestream’ accounts of such concepts as normal and dominant, deviant and other patterns of behaviour (Oakley 1987).

By the mid 1980s the flag had been well raised, and the canon fired, but the complete revolution had not happened. Considerable work had been done to change policies towards a non-sexist curriculum; principle four of The Curriculum Review, published by the New Zealand Department of Education in 1987 stated that the curriculum shall be non-sexist. Equal and neutral policies halted increasing sexism in schools but did not redress the balance. Any movements towards Cixous’ and Woolf’s vision of a female-centred knowledge were regarded with suspicion and often haunted by cries of reverse sexism. We had seen some impact from feminism on schooling and curriculum, but not really on the pedagogy. What would be the effect of women educators teaching a feminist curriculum with a feminist pedagogy, asked Sara Delamont? My purpose to this point has been to outline some areas in education which feminists have felt the need to address; now I will consider how other educators have provided some support for feminist teachers in addressing them.

**Teaching feminism or teaching which is feminist?**

Women’s Studies courses are the first obvious sources of an alliance for feminist teachers both in schools and in other disciplines. Their content, philosophies and priorities are obviously similar. But what about their pedagogy?

Jennifer Gore (1993) articulates a distinction between *feminist* pedagogies and feminist *pedagogies*. She sees the former being descriptive of the approaches to teaching used by many teachers who work within Women’s Studies, most commonly within tertiary institutions. She describes the second - feminist *pedagogies* - as those undertaken by feminists who work within education. I find this a helpful distinction, however the analysis that
I have developed from this distinction is different from the significance which Gore attaches to it.

In feminist pedagogy as well as content changes, some of the feminist 'ways of working' are introduced into the classroom. Methods such as collaborative work are used, personal experience is validated, the teacher uses a non-didactic style. These are claimed as feminist strategies as if they emerged from the women's movement alone, and as if they have no precedent in other pedagogical schools. The focus is on the feminism rather than on the pedagogy, but it is not always true that good classroom praxis emerges automatically out of political theory, nor is it "a necessary outcome of raised consciousness" (Kenway and Modra, in Gore 1993, p23).

For me, the weaknesses of feminist pedagogy lie in the lack of a knowledge base in educational theory, the tendency to dismiss most educational theory as being patriarchal, and the tendency, in not giving priority to thinking about pedagogy, to become stuck in a limited range of teaching strategies.

Unfortunately, the new found concern with pedagogy in academic departments outside the discipline of educational theory and practice is often characterized by a refusal to engage the diverse work that has been undertaken in this field by a number of critical educational theorists. For example, while pedagogy has become a 'hot' topic in literary, French, gender and English studies, the books produced in these disciplines largely suggest, by virtue of their theoretical gaps and structured silences, that pedagogy as a form of critical and political practice is a new theoretical invention discovered and developed within the narrow confines of each of these respective disciplines. (Giroux 1994, p124)

This lack of knowledge-base in pedagogical theory will set up difficulties as Women's Studies courses become larger in numbers, when without thorough consideration of the pedagogical issues, teachers may not be able to adapt their teaching reflectively. It is easier to establish a feminist environment in small, usually women-only classes, than it will be in the increasingly large, lecture style classrooms of contemporary Women's Studies. I am also concerned about the isolation of the predominantly tertiary Women's Studies teaching from other teaching environments which have quite different demands; secondary and primary schooling for example where the pedagogical environment is so much more complex than it is within the privileged and more homogeneous environment of
tertiary Women's Studies. If academic feminist energies go predominantly into the pedagogy of Women's Studies without regard to the wider teaching environment we will fail to develop a sufficiently sophisticated feminist pedagogy for it to have a chance of success in schools.

There are many connecting points in the two approaches and it would not be sensible to ignore them. Both, as Gore explains, have the characteristics of aiming to create a nurturing environment in the classroom, of using experiential learning, or promoting the ethic of caring through an emphasis on collaboration, of recognising individual and diverse voices, of sharing a commitment to the empowerment of learners. There are many attributes of feminism, emphasised in the feminist pedagogy, which are invaluable parts of a pedagogy which is feminist. But we do need to be aware of the difference between teaching feminism, which is the focus in Women's Studies, and teaching which is feminist.

The strengths of the latter over the former are that by bringing the issues of gender into the classroom the teacher, who is also a feminist, is able to employ both feminist theory, and mainstream and radical pedagogy. By looking at all aspects which go to make up the teaching and learning experience, rather than concentrating on the curriculum, feminist pedagogy is able to have a much broader number of areas in which to work for change. This will be evident particularly in its analysis of the institutional impact on schooling, the way in which the role of the teacher is implicated in the nature of the institution, and the complex intermingling of authority and power, dependence and responsibility, especially for girls and women.

Another advantage which I see in emphasising the pedagogical matters is that there are allies and support to be gained for feminist teachers within the radical or critical pedagogical community; probably more than there are out in the wider academic community for the Women's Studies agenda. So for strategic purposes, as well as for the mutuality of the alliance, I think it is useful to look beyond Women's Studies for the development of a pedagogy which is feminist.
Critical challenges in common?
Simon attributes to critical pedagogies, among other things, a commitment
to expanding the range of human capacities. This would also be acceptable
as a broad aim for feminist educators in spite of all their many diversities.
Critical pedagogy is about helping to bring changes in the lived and
intellectual situations of people. It begins from the premise that no
educational system is without politics, and every teacher in some way
presents their own political perspective. "...the teacher has to ask, what
kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favour of whom am
I being a teacher?" The aim of critical pedagogy is emancipation, through
the empowerment of learners. Critical theorists such as Giroux, Shor,
Apple, McLaren, and Freire have emphasised the potential role of
schooling in bringing about major social change because it has such a
broad base, affecting the lives of so many people. As the basis for their
development of curriculum, critical or emancipatory theorists are looking
for ways of teaching and learning which free people from "coercion and
control, from consensus, compromise and manipulation" (Freire, quote by

Critical theorists look at all aspects of pedagogy, as do feminists. They
draw attention to the way in which schooling is instituted to maintain and
promote 'common sense' notions of what knowledge is, of what the
purpose of schooling is, of how teachers should behave, of what
constitutes accountability. They criticise the notion that teaching is
something teachers do, and learning is what students do. Freire's work is
an example of such an approach (Freire, quoted in Grundy 1987). He
describes the current systems of education as suffering from "narration
sickness", teachers telling all the time. If education is to change lives, he
argues that it must engage learners actively in the learning programme.
The learning needs to be meaningful, and it must provide the learners with
the tools to be critical. This means that the learner must be cognitively
active, not the passive receiver of pre-determined teaching. It is typical of
critical pedagogy to resist pre-set competency based approaches to
teaching and learning. The teaching should begin with the learner, and the
curriculum content "should be derived from its beginnings, not from the
current end objectives" (ibid).
Student experiences are valued, and the contribution of the learner to the classroom environment is important in an emancipatory pedagogy. However as well as inviting students to work from their experiences, teachers need also to challenge them. Freire called the process ‘desocialisation’ which means recognising and challenging accepted ways of knowing, the myths, values, morals and behaviours of the society in which the learning takes place. A complex example of this can be seen in the roles taken traditionally by Maori women in the powhiri, or welcoming ceremonies. While we need to accept these roles as the authentic way in which protocol is observed, and we need to be aware that criticism of them could be labelled as racist ignorance by pakeha people, the traditional kaupapa also needs to be re-thought for the way in which it perpetuates set roles and myths about the nature of women within Maori protocol. (For a significant discussion of these issues see Irwin 1993.) In other words assessing the nature and extent of what constitutes power in every context is a complex process, but it can not be overlooked because it is an important contribution to emancipatory learning within critical pedagogy.

There are major implications for the role of the teacher and for teacher education in the work of critical theorists. Arnowitz and Giroux (1985) for example, call upon teachers to become ‘transformative intellectuals’ rather than transmission agents. Transformative intellectuals approach knowledge not as a given body to be passed on, but as a dynamic set of parts which can be constructed in a variety of ways to make meanings. In this framework the teacher must do more than represent a static epistemology and its consequent culture to her students. She is working with the students to construct and reconstruct the culture in terms of new contexts. Freire emphasises that culture is something which people are making every day in how they behave, relate, and interact. He calls this the anthropological concept of culture. It is not something given to us, we each participate in making or remaking it (McLaren and Leonard eds 1993, pp30-31).

In order for teachers to have such a sense of their task they need to be trained as more than technicians who merely operate the teaching machine. Michael Apple (1979) describes schools as places which process information, acting either as agents of cultural hegemony, or on behalf of selected traditions. The standardisation of compulsory curriculum in
response to calls for the accountability of teachers increasingly takes away from teachers the ability to respond to learners’ needs, and it diminishes the professionalism of contributing to curriculum development. It leaves teachers with the role of transmitting a pre-determined curriculum. A critical pedagogy requires an emancipatory teacher to be more than just a deliverer of the curriculum, and so do feminist pedagogies (see Lather 1993, and Weiler 1991). These are aspects on which we can work together.

Critical theorists would call on teachers who wanted to work in an emancipatory way to develop a ‘vision of hope’, a new view of language - critical literacy, a sense of reflection, the use of dialogue, an emphasis on questioning rather than answering - problem-posing rather than problem solving.

In maintaining a commitment to a vision of hope critical theorists separate themselves out from postmodernists. Giroux (1992) calls it a utopian vision, a moral and political belief that one can make a difference in combating tyranny, both public and domestic, and in helping to create a society in which people are able to exhibit moral courage, and in keeping a check on the operation of a system of justice which is both compassionate and moral.

Feminists and critical theorists form a united band in a common distrust of free market economical strategies, and of unquestioned subscription to technological developments. Szudlarek (1993) draws attention to the developmental of a global economy with virtually uncontrollable multinational corporations which try to ignore difference in a search for ‘horizontal’ markets with ever increasing populist appeal. Lyotard (1993) has argued that the disasters of the Twentieth Century have not been caused by the lack of technological progress, but by the extent of it. We have seen terrifying weapons of war, increased pollution and climate warming, as well as the technologies associated with the workplace which have led to unemployment and increased the gap between the wealthy and the poor. One disastrous contemporary consequence for schooling is the attempt to bring market forces into the management of schools with a focus on their inputs and outputs, and the drive for their increased financial efficiencies. (Beyer and Apple eds, 1988) The New Zealand Business Round Table continues to advocate a business model for
schooling.¹ Feminists and critical theorists alike have debunked the claims that schools are responsible for levels of unemployment or for the international and monetary success or failure of nations (for example, Shor, quoted in Stanley 1992).

I see a further correlation in the relationship between feminist and critical pedagogy in their common commitment to a vision of the lives of learners being ‘better’ as a result of their learning experiences. Without this I think teachers do become merely passers-on of the curriculum, merely mouthpieces for ‘official knowledge’ (Apple 1993). There is the trap in this as Patti Lather (1991) points out that in becoming committed to our own visions we may operate as though they are what others need. But part of the context of critical pedagogy is a resolve to continue self critique, to be attentive to the seductive power that the role of the teacher can sometimes take on. Learning to critique and reflect on our teaching should begin in pre-service teacher education, which is also an area in which feminist educators need to work to widen the source of potential allies.

Critical teacher education
Teacher education could be an important component in the development of critical and reflective feminist teachers. Unfortunately too often it focusses the training of teachers on set activities that will work in the classroom. A dilemma of pre-service teacher education is how to reassure student teachers that a particular strategy or resource which they may be taught is of less importance to the success of their teaching than gathering theoretical, political and philosophical insights with which to frame their practice. An analogy could be developed between the ‘good ideas’ approach of much teacher education and the giving of lumps of toffee to starving children who just want the instant satisfaction of something to eat. You know that they will benefit so much more from the vegetables are taking some time to cook. If they gorge on the toffee now, they won’t realise their need for the vegetables until a little later. Six months later the negative effects of the toffee diet will show, but by then it may be too late to change what has become an addiction to a quick fix.

It is difficult finding the ‘right’ moment in teacher education when student teachers are able to reflect on their teaching, to become aware of the social
and political outcomes of their teaching. At the beginning of their teacher development they feel the need to concentrate on what they want to be doing themselves in order to start functioning in a classroom. But at the same time they need to clarify their own beliefs about the purpose of teaching, and start to examine critically the methods and materials they are which bolster the hidden curriculum that lurks in the shadows.

Perhaps the starting point for this is in better directed observation of the classrooms the student teachers visit on teaching practice. Teaching practice should focus on asking questions rather than on looking for the solutions which associate teachers have found to various problems in their classrooms. It means becoming adept at recognising the dilemmas which abound in any classroom, rather than at accepting the common practice (Valli ed, 1992). If the student teachers are unable to do this then we get in its place a pragmatic of the worst kind. I will mention two examples from recent experience in our teacher education programme: a young man, after only four weeks in an induction time in the College of Education and an extended 8 weeks teaching practice, said with great confidence that now that he had had time to see his associate teachers preparing students for the assessment tasks he knew what it was really important to concentrate on; and another student said after the same time that she had ‘run out of things to teach’, so her associate said that you can’t prepare wonderful lessons all the time, and she resorted to textbook exercises to ‘keep the kids busy and quiet’. Winning these students back to an appreciation of the value of theory in their practice is hard work.

I believe we need more theory rather than less in the preparation of teachers. Without it students fail to recognise the located and partial aspect of everything that they and we do in classrooms. They also fail to gain the tools of critical and feminist analysis with which to deconstruct the traditional discourses of educational theory and practice. Instead of seeing the possible choices that we have as teachers, students begin to read the institutions they enter as regimes of truth, as ‘the way things are’. (This will be more fully developed in the chapter ‘A Woman’s True Profession’.)

During their teacher education, teachers need to be reminded of the political nature of all teaching, that neither the curriculum nor any set of teaching strategies is objective and neutral. They need to examine the
implications of various underlying assumptions characteristic of all methodologies. Similarly they need to deconstruct all the resources and content materials of their subject area, drawing students’ attention to what they represent, and in what context they were developed (see Lankshear and McLaren eds. 1993). There is also considerable work being done in the area of critical literacy in English teaching in Australia, demonstrated for example in the journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, *English in Australia*.

**The lessons of reading and writing**

Another joint concern of many critical pedagogies, and of feminists, is trying to find new approaches to learning about and using language. Stuckey (1992) argues that literacy is a powerful part of pedagogy, setting the perimeters within which learning can take place:

> This is to say that literacy is a function of culture, social experience, and sanction. Literacy education begins in the ideas of the socially and economically dominant class, and it takes the forms of socially acceptable subjects, stylistically permissible forms, ranges of difference or deviance, baselines of gratification. Becoming literate signifies in large part the ability to conform or, at least, to appear conformist. The teaching of literacy, in turn, is a regulation of access. (Stuckey 1991, p19)

The worlds beyond schooling, such as the business world or the political world, the literary world and the world of the dominant groups in society, define the kind of literacy which is acceptable, which enables the user to participate, to go unnoticed as different within their walls. The decision has been made already about what constitutes the ‘standard’ literacy, about how literacy is defined. The decision seems so final that it is very difficult even to put the question. The question ‘what kind of literacy should we teach in schools?’ suggests that there are alternatives, equally legitimate alternatives. The emancipatory teacher, and the feminist teacher would agree that there are alternatives, but constrained within the regular systems of education they, we, have a dilemma. We can for example, accept the learner’s language in the classroom and validate it, then use that starting point as the place on which to build the student’s knowledge of the socially legitimated standard.
In Australia this approach is called the genre theory approach to literacy teaching. Genre theory developed in Australia during the 1980s. It has its linguistic origins in the work of M. A. K. Halliday whose major project in language education was to propose language development programmes consisting of language learning, learning through language, and learning about language (Christie 1990, p 19). Learning language is therefore about learning to understand the organising principles of grammar, and how to manipulate the various linguistic items, creating patterns through which meanings are made. Successful entry to society involves learning how to recognise and use its ways of meaning.

Frances Christie went on from there to argue that schooling consists of a range of patterns or genres which if used and manipulated properly will help students have success in school. These genres - which are any purposeful, staged, culturally created activities which find expression in language form (Christie in Tchudi 1985, p24) - require teaching. They require teachers to take responsibility to teach explicitly the genres which students will need during their schooling. If teachers refuse this responsibility, language will remain a mystery, part of the hidden curriculum of schooling.

Genre theory has its pedagogical origins in a radical opposition to the values and assumptions of the ‘personal growth’ model of English teaching which emerged after the Dartmouth Conference of 1966, which was the first major international meeting of English teachers. According to Doecke (1995) the genre theorists see the personal growth, or student-centred model of English education as a progressive ideology which has had its day. The personal growth model is characterised by implicit, contextualised instruction, where the teacher is a facilitator of learning in a child-centred curriculum. There is considerable focus on inquiry and process oriented pedagogy. An excellent explication and critique of this approach can be found in Pam Gilbert’s book Writing, Schooling and Deconstruction (1989).

By contrast genre based teaching is exercised as explicit teaching, especially of language functions, and the teacher is directly interventionist, actively laying open the requirements of school genres, and teaching students how to acquire them.
Criticism of the genre approach focusses on two major aspects: the tendency to imply that the content is more important that the needs of learners, and the failure of the ‘genre-ists’ to provide any critique of the school required genres. Language is not seen by them as problematic, rather it is public property, a neutral medium which we simply need to become adept at learning.

Although in terms of the debate between the two models for English education the arguments have often been polarised (see English in Australia from 1986 until 1995), in practice both approaches have similar strategies, and as Doecke (1995) states, ‘the best teachers’ use a combination from both models. For example, both call for increased use of different language registers within the classroom, using language as a tool for learning, especially oral language and expressive personal writing. Both encourage teachers to use interactive, lively varied classroom materials and environments. But both leave critical issues for further discussion. In relation to the growth model and its implications for the feminist classroom, I take these questions up in detail in chapter nine ‘Firing the Canon in the English Classroom’.

In relation to genre theory, there is a tendency to accept a hierarchical notion of what constitutes prestigious or demanding genres, and to privilege them over others. So, for example, the formal essay, or expository style is seen as more demanding and therefore of more importance than creative writing or personal narrative. This attitude is clearly conveyed to students, who as they progress through school to senior levels do less and less of the creative or narrative writing genres. (A recent instruction from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority to English teachers required that candidates for Bursary English should use ‘transactional’ writing in all their essay answers, not expressive or poetic writing. Transactional writing is the formal expository style.) The formal genres of schooling gain more recognition and value than do the other genres which children use, and bring from their homes. So, long term what the student learns is that her/his own language is not the right one for gaining access to ‘the socially and economically dominant class’.
There is an emancipatory myth associated with the acquisition of literacy that it will end oppression, unemployment, poverty, lack of opportunity, and so on. As the feminist teacher well knows from her experience of being defined as ‘other’ against the male ‘norm’, until the literacy ‘norm’ is re-examined critically for its partiality and gaps, and resituated in relation to alternative other forms, then it remains an oppressive structure denying the legitimacy of any other form. Depending on how literacy is taught it can be effectively stripped of any potential to develop critical or transformative potential, and the genre theory approach often falls into this trap. Pam Gilbert (1994, p43) asks:

For instance, at the broad institutional level of text analysis, is it men or women who occupy the most powerful cultural writing positions in contemporary society - in the Church, the judiciary, the government? Similarly, who are the writers of history, of science, of medicine, - and who are the writers of personal letters, of shopping lists, of diaries? Who are the writers of political essays - and who of magazine stories? Which written genres are women most frequently associated with? Which are men associated with? How might this change? How has it changed in some social situation?

These are critical, feminist questions which genre theory has not adequately addressed. Critical and feminist pedagogies using postmodern ways of thinking need to find better strategies than the genre theory to approach the teaching of literacy. Pragmatically it will be a long time before different literacies other than standard literacy are given equivalent status and provide equal access. However teachers can help learners approach the notion of literacy from a critical perspective so that they can understand how the world can be read in different ways; it can be represented through language in different ways, making possible different understandings and legitimating different identities and aspirations (Lankshear and Mclaren eds 1993).

The New London group (1996) is a collection of scholars within English education who are currently looking for ways of language teaching which will move us beyond the ‘emancipatory myth’ to ways of language teaching which they are calling the pedagogy of multiliteracies. They want to encourage an acceptance of there no longer being a singular canonical English, and move towards the development of an epistemology about literacy learning which validates pluralism, and provides access to success within schooling, ‘without people having to erase or leave behind them
different subjectivities' (p 72). The New London group is encouraging discussion about the potential of multiliteracy pedagogy to provide learners with a metalanguage which will account for linguistic diversities, and enable them to 'design' strategies so that they can move comfortably from one language situation to another. Currently their work is provisional, inviting further international discussion, but in its initial stages it seems to me to have a focus which will be radical enough to address some of the barriers to literacy which have limited the learning potential of many students, including girls.

So there are allies out there for feminist teachers. The community of the feminist movement, particularly of women's studies is available; there are the critical pedagogies, with their visions of transformative democratic teaching practice; there are those who seek to review the means and content of curriculum such as the teachers committed to critical literacy. We have already seen how the first and last of these have their limitations as far as feminist pedagogy is concerned. So too do those involved in critical pedagogy.

Separate as well as strategic
Feminist critique of some of its allies such as those within critical pedagogy, shows up a tendency for its exponents to be trapped in some sexism. Stanley (1992) acknowledges that radical male educators have been gender blind, particularly in their theoretical frameworks which often have their roots in masculinist Marxism. He has noticed that women feminist educators pay attention to different priorities from the ones men focus on. For example, feminist educators deconstruct the issues of power related to a teacher's role with more attention to how a teacher needs to balance establishing authority while working on building community. This is because the male critical theorists have never been aware of the issues around the perception of women as authority figures within schools.

Luke (in Stanley 1992, p36) notes that while critical pedagogy has been more responsible about women than traditional educationalists, its exponents have assumed a kind of androgynous teacher and learner, which has led to a tendency to celebrate the 'authentic' voice of a learner as if there are no differential limitations on such voices. Pagano (1990) draws
critical attention to an assumption often made by those for whom feminism is not their priority that once we have met the different needs of learners then they will have access to the same chance. But is it the same chance that we all want? Isn’t there a form of assimilation embedded in this idea?

Another problem has been the tendency for the men critical theorists, once they started to acknowledge the feminist claims, to simply add women to their lists of acknowledged oppressed. Or, to use inclusive language assuming that their ideas could be expanded to cover women as well.

Freire is an example of one of the critical theorists who placed emphasis on new forms of social praxis but not on personal liberation. Freire’s contribution to democratic educative processes has been enormous, especially the skills he emphasised and actively taught of having learners name their oppressed situation, analyse it, and then work on creating new transformative situations. Where feminists, especially those of us working with postmodern ways of thinking have gone further is in questioning the extent to which there is a valid collective experience of oppression. Freire’s work relies largely on a common, class-based sense of what it means to be oppressed. In this way, especially in his early work he ignored the importance of the personal and domestic liberation required in the lives of women, and the differences between the voices of men and women. In recent interviews Freire has remarked on his failure to acknowledge the differences which women experience because of the oppression occasioned by gender (Freire and Faundez 1992). Postmodern feminists, as Weiler (1991) demonstrates, contributed an analysis of the experience of gendered oppression which was much more complex and layered in nature. For example, even within similar class locations women, people of colour, gay and lesbian people experience educative settings differently. The personal relationships between men and women, between sisters and their brothers, fathers and daughters, as well as between mothers and sons have a number of consequences for the educational experiences and future expectations of girls. In addition, postmodern feminists would also layer the analysis by paying attention to how the assumptions of differences between men and women have been constructed, rather than being somehow ‘natural’.
It may be that some of the changes women want to see are changes that men, even politically radical men, are not ready for. To pursue a feminist agenda for equity in education will inevitably have huge repercussions for the access of men to decision-making positions in education which they have traditionally controlled. I would put forward the idea that the next set of major changes for improved women's experiences in education will require a great deal of giving up by men of their power. The still extensive need for changes in women's self esteem and body images require huge re-socialisation of men, their attitudes and behaviours in relation to women.

Over the last 6 years in New Zealand we have seen the erosion of any emphasis on women's issues in education (Middleton 1993, p14). The separate units within the Ministry to look into such issues have been disestablished, as has the Women's Advisory Council On Education. Just trying to access recent statistics on the position of women in education, or the achievement of girls is more difficult than it was 5 years ago. The requirement that school charters contain statements on equity policies assessed by Middleton as having the potential "to be the strongest yet introduced in the world with respect to ethnicity/culture and gender" has been made optional (Middleton and Jones 1992, p2). It may be that the feminist emphasis was seen as too disturbing a force for change within education. Perhaps this is because there is a basic commitment to change and emancipation which sharpens and enlivens a feminist classroom, making it too challenging a force to mainstream education. I recognise a parallel in something bell hooks wrote about in her recent work, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994). She recalls that as a child in the exclusively black school she attended, for all the poverty of the school in a material sense, there was a commitment from her black teachers to teach passionately for the future potential of the students. There was a vision of a better future to which the education would contribute and this gave the school environment a vigour, an energy and a radicalism. It was this which she noted as lacking in the integrated schools she went to later. In her experience the integrated schools were more committed to keeping the status quo. The energy of the schools committed to education of black students for change was disintegrated because the overwhelming concerns and the sheer numbers of white students and their teachers were not towards change.
I can see in our current moves to assume that gender issues are an integrated part of the education package there is similarly a lack of push for change. The boys don’t see the need for it, men are aware of how it would affect their career prospects, and many girls and women teachers for various and complex reasons identify with the needs of boys and men. In my view we still need an overtly feminist agenda, which will work for the welfare of girls, introduce what I believe to be more invigorating ways of teaching and learning, and consequently improve the quality of the school climate for both girls and boys. Feminist pedagogy needs to be taken on primarily by women in order to keep its vitality and its difference.

Of course there are some elements within feminism that also need revising and reconsidering, particularly as postmodernist theory challenges the essentialism of some earlier feminist scholarship. The biological essentialism of theorists such as Chodorow (1978) and Firestone (1972) need reconsideration for the way they assume ‘natural’ roles for women, especially the nurturing side of the teacher. It can be confusing in relation to the feminist teacher’s use of authority in the classroom when her perceived womanly nurturing appears to be in conflict with her need to be authoritative. We need a different concept of woman’s ‘nature’, or at least different ways of using the concept, or we make it hard for ourselves to challenge students in an assertive way (Rich 1978, Ellsworth 1989, Gore 1993).

Another difficulty that feminists face in the classroom is when our feminism gets in the way of the pedagogy, especially if it functions to silence some students. Or, if the expectations placed on us, and by us because we are feminists are unreasonably high, we can cause disappointment to others and become disillusioned ourselves. Since being a feminist teacher amounts to more than being a feminist who teaches, (Gore 1993) it can become a very complex role to juggle.

Given these complexities it is important that we work on building alliances with colleagues who share similar concerns, and who can add to our knowledge and experience. However neither collective nor progressive agency will guarantee improved teaching and learning experiences for girls and women. My coming to postmodern ways of thinking has taught
me to be suspicious as well as open to collectives and modernism. Foucault (1983) has argued the process of working towards emancipation will never be finished. No cause or struggle is without power dynamics. However we work, we will need to guard against giving the impression that we have found the true vision. As a woman I have learned to doubt my own authority, but maybe as a postmodern feminist I can turn this doubt from being something which undermines my self esteem, into something which is a constructive questioning, recognition/realisation of my fallibilities.

And so, I move on into the thesis less convinced by modernist frameworks, and towards a greater understanding of the demands of postmodern feminisms on pedagogy.

Notes

1 In The Press Christchurch, 20/5/96, the top headline for the day was “Myers blasts education ‘muddle’: NZ economy should be model, business head tells council”. The article went on to quote the head of the Business Round Table Douglas Myers, saying that “Education should be run along the lines of much of the New Zealand economy”.

Interlude: thinking postmodern

In order to write about postmodernism and how I relate it to teaching, it might be useful for me, and for the reader, if I try to examine my own intellectual development and my path towards my present position where I would say that the dominant influences on my thinking are feminism, being a lesbian and understanding something of queer theory, post modernism, and at least some awareness, if elementary, of the significance of race and of psychoanalysis.

I think that as a child I was always one for a ‘cause’. I was brought up in a home where no-one had progressed beyond the fourth form at school. In some cases that was by choice. I think my mother could have stayed longer at school if she had wished, but her inclination was not to. She was too fun loving and lively to be confined any longer by a narrow small town high school. Anyway, hers was a background of childhood poverty mixed with pride. Passed down from her mother was an attitude which said you paid cash for what you could, or you didn’t have it, and you worked hard and honourably at whatever job you could get. Earning money was the only way to be independent, so for her even a young woman’s beginning wages in unskilled work were more attractive than dependence. But somehow a belief in the education which she herself rejected was embedded in my mother’s philosophy. Marriage to my father, who had also left school young, aged 13 in fact, to work on his father’s farm - it was the end of the depression and times were still hard - gave her more financial security than she had ever had. My father received a returned soldiers’ loan to get him onto his own land, after the war. In spite of his lack of formal education my father was a very clever man, interested in science, excellent at Maths, capable as a young farmer. In times that went well economically for New Zealand he quickly prospered on the farm. He should have stayed on it. But my mother found the life difficult. She was a city girl. She hated the quiet of the country life, so we moved to town with a good investment in the bank. My mother was happier, my brother was born, my grandmother lived with us.

The three adults in our house were uneducated, formally, but they were ambitious, they were devoted to their new generation of offspring who were gratifyingly able and keen at school, at music. (My gifted brother became a concert pianist.) All this is to explain that in spite of lacking a formal cultural and educational capital, my brother and I were given the encouragement and the financial support for an education. Though the home lacked books it was full of talk and argument. The other part of my inheritance or capital as a daughter, was a complete confidence in myself,
my rights as a young woman. My mother and grandmother were strong
and capable women, and as far as they were concerned I was destined for
a profession. My father seemed quietly happy with this too.

It was my grandmother who gave me the language gifts. She was the
most vociferous one to argue with over endless dinner table discussions.
From her I learned to argue my causes to the sometimes rather bitter end.
It was with her I went to the library and with her I discussed books. She
it was who gave me my few books as presents. She was the one who
helped write my speeches for speech day, and rehearsed me, endlessly,
'correcting my elocution', and of course with her fire in me I won. From
this family I learned to argue and articulate a cause. And I was ripe for
conversion to a branch of the Christian church in 1963. I stayed with it
for 8 years, even marrying briefly to become a vicar's wife.

Quite a shift from fundamental Anglicanism to postmodern feminism!
But there were quite a few stages on the way. For all my 'good'
education, and it was, and for all the love and encouragement of my
family - even after a year of almost complete failure at university - I
lacked a deep intellectual training. My quick mind often jumped into
things without having thought through their implications. Happy to
have understood and grasped something, valuing new learning I leapt
into theology with gusto. But if I was ever to become an intellectual, to be
able to reflect on things, to have enough background in theoretical issues,
I had years of reading to catch up. I still feel that I haven't made up the
gap, especially in psychology and philosophy, and in political science. I
wasn't trained in my undergraduate years as a 'scholar'. I read books,
loved them, read the critics, loved them, listened intently in lectures,
loving them, and repeated it all back in my essays. I wasn't trained to
read texts. My educational bank account was being stuffed full of
currency that was already out of date and became largely useless to me,
leaving me a dependent learner awaiting the next deposit.

After university I went into teaching, loving it too. And from the
beginning in a very efficient, lively, impassioned way I think I was good.
Pupils loved my classes, if in a slightly terrified way, because I demanded
things of them, I was very quick and efficient. They had to work hard, to
think hard, and there were always surprises in my class. We did things
differently. But most importantly I started to become interested in how
people learn. Perhaps that wasn't the most important thing. Maybe more
important was that my marriage failed, and I left the church, and I
started to think about some feminist issues. And I met Livia, the
German-Hungarian, intellectual woman who became my lover and my
intellectual inspiration. From her I learned how to think, how to learn,
how to become an intellectual. There were of course other strands than
Livia in this process. But as my partner for 7 or more years she fostered
my development. My own professional development had lead me into
national curriculum work in my subject area, and I was more in contact
with progressive theory in English Education. I returned to University
for postgraduate work, and wrote a feminist thesis which introduced me to feminist literary theory.

I think too, that the lived experience of being a lesbian was the other crucial experience for me. It meant that my life was lived outside of the ‘norm’. I was on the margins. To me my difference did not feel ‘abnormal’. I felt true to myself, the most normal I had ever been. So if I felt normal, and ‘they’ said that ‘they’ were the norm, the answer in my feisty view, having been trained to stand up for myself from my grandmother, was that there must be more than one norm. The grand normalising narratives that had been passed down to me as truths must be only part of the many stories that were to be told. At the same time my classroom was becoming an ever more complex place, so many variables, possibilities, so much ‘difference’ at work in it. I was a living postmodernist, and I was ready to soak up the theoretical perspective it offered me.
Chapter Three

Feminism, Foucault and Pedagogy -
Weaving Them Together!

I believe that there is something about the experiences of feminist teachers in our classrooms, engaging with so many people as thinking and feeling individuals that almost 'naturally' leads our development of educational theory inevitably towards postmodernism.

- Jennifer Gore, The Struggle for Pedagogies

Among Feminisms, Foucault - here to some extent standing as representative of postmodernism - and pedagogy there seem to be many natural webs of connecting threads. Some of the threads are fragile, some are very complicated and full of difficult knots, and there are points at which the web stands fractured and useless, where the connections are best broken completely. In this chapter the benefits and problems for feminism and pedagogy of making alliances with postmodern philosophy will be examined. My aim is to frame the development of a basis for a pedagogy which brings about changes in the lives, the teaching and learning, and the professional experiences of women and girls in education.

Schooling in a democracy, such as New Zealand, is said to be, is believed to be, a process which allows people to develop themselves, to equip themselves with the skills of literacy and numeracy that will give them control over their lives and freedom to act, as the National Curriculum statement says

The New Zealand Curriculum recognises that all students should have the opportunity to undertake study in essential areas of learning and to develop essential skills. Such learning will enable
them to develop their potential, to continue learning throughout life, and to participate effectively and productively in New Zealand’s democratic society and in a competitive world economy. ... (page 3)

All young people in New Zealand have the right to gain through the state schooling system, a broad, balanced education that prepares them for effective participation in society. ... (page 5)

The school curriculum, through its practices and procedures, will reinforce the commonly held values of individual and collective responsibility which underpin New Zealand’s democratic society. These values include honesty, reliability, respect for others, respect for the law, tolerance (rangimarie), fairness, caring or compassion (aroha), non-sexism, and non-racism. ... (page 21) (Ministry of Education. (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Learning Media, Wellington.)

This approach is based in a liberal modernist notion which implies that the education system is neutrally beneficent to the student and the teacher who have rights to literacy, numeracy, and other learning skills, and to places within a democratic system. The further implication is that education can achieve these rights on behalf of the individual. *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*, (1994) has guaranteed that each student will have access to literacy. This sounds like a reputable, enlightened, benign, progressive guarantee. But what kind of literacy will it be? How will it be taught? How will it be tested? What happens to those who fail?

The decisions about what constitutes successful literacy have been taken on behalf of teachers and students, in many forums beyond the classroom, even beyond New Zealand shores. In order to monitor the progress towards standard literacy the New Zealand English curriculum has been divided into eight levels of achievement, each level being loosely attached to progressive years of schooling. For example, average students in form 1, normally aged about 11 years, are expected to have reached specified levels of attainment in all of the 6 aspects of the curriculum: reading, writing, listening, speaking, presenting and viewing. The concept behind such a curriculum design is that each student should have access to the same learning opportunities no matter where in the country she or he lives, no matter what gender, culture, or class she or he comes from. It represents a commonly held belief in fairness, in humane and democratic systems. The national education system defines what is ‘normal’ or ‘average’, and then offers a
commitment to achieving that standard for every student. The educational discourse is thus established.

It is in recognising the characteristics of the typical discourse of schooling, and in examining the relationship between power and certain kinds of knowledge, that postmodern theorists have made a major contribution to rethinking notions of education, as well as to questioning the taken-for-granted knowledge about what constitutes appropriate curriculum content, teaching methodology, and classroom behaviour. A postmodern reading of the schooling discourse reveals the extent to which each of us, working within the education networks, contributes to education as a production process, which normalises, situates and constructs us (Foucault, in Ball 1990).

Though not an easy task it is probably important to attempt to explain a postmodern philosophical position. The attempt to establish firm, rigid definitions is not part of a postmodern approach. Definitions are more characteristic of modernist philosophy where scholarship worthy of the name claims to be capable of objective, rational, scientific investigation, and as such able to be generalised and believed if its accuracy is well established. Lyotard has argued that modernism creates a legitimacy by referring to its own meta-discourse which it claims is universal. (Lyotard, in Stanley 1992) Postmodernists would say that all statements are interpretative. They are incredulous of meta-explanations for the way things are. Postmodernism is a way of thinking, and refuses to accept formulae. It claims that all meaning is unstable, that each of us can be read and interpreted like any text in many different ways, because our identities are complex, located within more than one discourse, and constantly being reconstituted. Feminism has been criticised for belonging within modernism and claiming to be yet another way of explaining and interpreting the world (for example, Nicholson, in Ferguson and Wicke eds 1994, pp75 - 6, or Flax 1993, pp131 - 147). Some feminist essentialist theory has appeared to be along such lines. Many feminists however would claim that their critique of patriarchy and its hegemonic explanations is not an attempt to replace one will-to-truth with another. They recognise the nature of difference and value its diversity, and they seek not to establish a new truth, but to establish the
opportunity for diverse ways of living and relating to coexist, rather than cancel each other out.

What I want to work through in this chapter involves coming to terms with some apparent contradictions between these two major theoretical positions both of which influence me. From my perspective as a feminist I see the need for change in the way education is organised and operates, because I see that women are disadvantaged by its systems and the 'common knowledge' about relationships between men and women and their capabilities which it perpetuates. I realise, of course that education is only one factor in the oppression of women within our society, but because we spend many hours within its institutional walls, and because people commonly feel that they 'know about' education, it has considerable impact on our lives. Obviously major changes have taken and are still taking place in the access for and experiences of women in education, though I look forward with a utopian vision to even more improvements, particularly in the consequences for women of their educational experiences beyond schooling.

You will notice in this chapter a number of ambiguities in some of my ideas. I see this as representative of the stage I am at in amalgamating postmodern and feminist theories. I seem to be concurrently holding to a belief that feminism can work through schooling to change the experiences of girls and women; yet fundamentally shaking that belief is a recognition of the postmodern stance that since everything is dangerous², and since every situation involves a rotating power dynamic of some and even various kinds, I can never guarantee that there will be even a possibility of change. Although I still hold on to some of my old positivist ideals, as someone influenced by postmodernism, I realise it is dangerous to believe naively that we are moving steadily towards a happy ending to the future of education as if it were a novel. Ambiguity number one.

The power of discourses is that they establish frameworks within which things become described as if they were natural. After they have been in existence for some time we lose sight of there being other ways in which things could be done or described. A good example of this is the widespread acceptance of formalistic approaches to teaching and learning, "an acceptance of a Cartesian-Newtonian mechanistic world
view that is caught in a cause-effect, hypothetico-deductive system of reasoning” Foucault 1983, p231). Kinchloe and Steinberg (1993) using both critical and postmodern perspectives, discuss the impact of theories such as Piaget’s stages of development on teaching and learning. They show how Piaget viewed intelligence as a process which can be followed through to various levels of mastery. According to Piaget’s theory it is particularly important that the path to mastery is followed rationally and objectively. The positive side to this is the idea that any ‘normal’ learner is capable of following the path and making progress. But a critical constructivist analysis which opposes linear, transmission approaches to teaching (ibid, and Dhillon 1995, pp1 - 20) and postmodern analysis, combined with a feminist approach, exposes developmentally based theories as specific, located sets of assumptions about how the mind functions, which fail to take account of the interrelationships of mind and emotions, of sociological, economic and historical factors.

Explicitly or implicitly in modern epistemology, whether rationalist or empiricist, the individual consciousness that is the subject of knowledge is transparent to itself, operates according to principles that are independent of embodied experience, and generates knowledge in a value-neutral way. (Longino in Alcoff and Potter 1993, p105.)

For all the usefulness of the ideas of developmental psychology in education, there is a problem with the way in which they construct and normalise certain stages of cognitive development, leading to assumptions about what constitutes ‘natural processes’ of learning. From a postmodern view I do not see learning being such a stable and predictable process. As learners we are always interactive with the contexts in which we are situated, influenced by the sociological, gender, economic, cultural and other factors which make up our fragmented and ever-shifting identities.

It is extremely difficult for anyone with a postmodern approach, with such a complex view of the factors involved in teaching and learning processes, to be so certain that education is able to make changes in people’s lives. Perhaps I need to reconsider my earlier and frequently expressed aim that a feminist pedagogy should change things in the lives of women and girls, and be more modest. Maybe as a teacher what I can
hope is to introduce people to different ways of thinking which may or may not change their experiences, and encourage them to see that “the world around us... is more like an idea than a machine” (Kinchloe and Steinberg 1993, p 310). Madeleine Grumet talks about learning to work with connecting patterns, uncovering the dances and the webs as a basic teaching and learning strategy (quoted in Kinchloe and Steinberg, 1993). Instead of committing ourselves to a formalist, cause and effect way of teaching everyone, as the National Curriculum in New Zealand suggests, we can gain more from helping students to trace the genealogy of their own learning paths, as Foucault uses the term. He speaks of genealogy as being meticulous, detailed work with documents of various kinds, seeking not their meaning, but how in context and with “sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (Rabinow ed 1984, p 76) we can construct an understanding of our source materials. I find this a challenging metaphor around which to build my pedagogy.

Postmodernism is itself a way of thinking, not a formula for changing the world. In attempting to use a postmodern approach to thinking about pedagogy I must try to avoid applying it in a transcendental way. So perhaps here is where I can resolve the conflict with which I began this section. As a teacher I cannot change the world, I cannot even change the lives of my students in any major way. The classroom in which I meet with them is too small a fragment of their lives. There is no meta-system or explanation that I can give them that will change their life experiences for them. However in working with attitudes to knowledge, in opening up various approaches to learning to them, in helping them to uncover those things that are not spoken of clearly in texts, in urging them to pursue knowledge of their own genealogies, I can, the teacher can, encourage students to think with difference. Instead of aiming to fulfil a pre-determined set of outcomes, or to follow through a pre-established set of developmental stages we need to be aware of how we each have different sources for our knowledge, different perceptions, and the potential for developing different metaphors for our understandings. There is no ‘level playing ground’ to begin with, no neat set of steps, no predictable outcome.

I will look now at ways in which a critical feminist pedagogy has much to learn from postmodern ways of thinking, before considering the
impediments it puts in the way of developing a classroom praxis, as well as the way in which postmodern theory has its own connections to patriarchy.

For all that many postmodern theorists have failed to locate patriarchy as a key element in their own genealogies, there are ways in which feminists have gained from postmodernism, ways in which through considering its concepts we have grown up and avoided becoming enmeshed in the development of yet another set of essentialist notions explaining the ‘reason’ for how things are. Central understandings now admitted into most feminist texts are those of impermanence and partiality. We have had to re-examine the model of the ‘feminist woman’ whom we began to construct in the seventies. Who was she? What should she wear? How should she behave? What should she be doing with her life? As we got together to discuss her we found her to be more diverse than we first thought. Some lesbian women felt excluded from her because they believed the feminist woman was constructed as a wonderfully free mother spirit, enriched by having taken control of and enjoying her fertility. Mothering home-making women thought the model was the bra-burning, overalled, mechanical dyke. Business women thought she was the alternative, commune-style dweller, living off the land and involved in non-exploitative shared, organic self-sufficiency. Black women saw her as a white, middle class intellectual. Attempts to develop a particular model always create the problem of the nonconformers, those who don’t fit the pattern, the ‘others’. A postmodern understanding of otherness, rejects the concept of a standard norm, an implied measuring stick which legitimates some and excludes others. Postmodern thinking encourages the recognition of multiple othernesses. We can see ourselves not only as other in being different from an-other, but as containing many othernesses within ourselves.

I am trying to explain how postmodernism is helpful in pushing us beyond developing essentialist definitions and categories. In the pedagogical framework for example, this means I am trying to push us beyond such beliefs that there are particular ways in which girls learn, or certain things that as a sex girls are naturally good at, and beyond
limiting girls and women to the stereotypical images in which they are commonly presented in texts and other sources of role models.

In *Destabilising Theory* (1992) Barrett and Phillips look at the impact of such ideas noting both the advantages and the disadvantages from feminisms’ points of view. In the word ‘destabilising’ they recognise a major contribution of postmodern thinking showing how it has challenged, subverted, reversed, and overturned the concept of binary oppositional thinking which is characteristic of much of patriarchy’s Western culture. They make the point that the feminist revival of the 1970s developed within the discourse of modernist thinking. So the transformation, brought about by postmodernist thinking, of feminist pedagogies has pushed us beyond describing the nature of girls and their learning patterns as if they are genetically inherited, beyond limiting the images of girls and women in various texts to stereotypical notions, and towards “a tolerance for ambiguity, ambivalence, and difference and the ability to flourish with an increasingly multiple and contradictory external world” (Flax 1993, p38).

A feature of a classroom practice which recognises such a spread and wealth of diversity amongst the participants will be negotiation, and negotiation is precisely one of the features which has characterised feminists’ ways of working. Essentialist feminism which tried to describe women’s ways of being was characteristic of earlier feminist work in the 1970s and 1980s. It still plays a role in developing feminist theories today. However the radical nature of feminism in its attack on patriarchy has meant that feminists have always been in the vanguard, maybe even leading postmodernists, in the concept of challenging a fundamentalist approach to truth and epistemology. Our uses of deconstruction strategies to unravel the patriarchal structures anticipated Lyotard’s explanation of postmodernism as “...that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them, but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable...” (Lyotard in Lather 1991, p6). I am reminded of Virginia Woolf in *To The Lighthouse*, written in 1927. At the end of a dinner party which has been described in considerable detail, and in parallel lines from the perspectives of several different characters, Mrs Ramsey takes her leave from the room:
With her foot on the threshold she waited a moment longer in a scene which was vanishing even as she looked, and then, as she moved and took Minta’s arm and left the room, it changed, it shaped itself differently; it had become, she knew, giving one last look at it over her shoulder, already the past. (Woolf 1972 edition, Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, p128.)

Virginia Woolf understood the fleeting, momentariness of existence, the different possible readings, the constant partiality and changing nature of our interactions, and the power of different discourses to enable or disempower different people.

Perhaps it is to do with women’s experience of the world being at least dual, in a way that many men’s is not. Women live in the dominant world constructed by patriarchy. We know it and experience it, it is represented to us by all the dominant texts and environments. But we also know the feminised, domestic, gendered world of women. In learning from the beginning to straddle equally well the public world of patriarchy and the private world of domesticity, women live constantly with the knowledge of duality. It is part of our inheritance.

Virginia Woolf foreshadowed another attribute of postmodern thinking. She identified the otherness of women, the differences in how women respond and give priorities compared to men. But in working on the differences of women she was establishing women not as an other to the norm man, but as an alternative other to the other man. In *The Three Guineas* (1938) she shows that men’s approaches to education and society in general are so androcentric as to be harmful to the development of women. She pleads for women to study the lives of other women, not of other men, to learn about living and the past from the shop girl or the old woman crossing the road, rather than from some expert male historian’s book explaining yet again the cause of someone’s (no doubt a man’s) rise to power. She argues that a suitable education for women will not be gained by linking into what men had created for themselves as education, but by setting entirely new criteria for an equal, alternative education system for women. She asserts the equal, alternative validity of a woman’s contextualised voice against the impersonal and abstract voice of the male academy. Feminists and postmodernists are in many ways natural allies, with feminists such as Virginia Woolf foreshadowing
in their life experiences, their texts and their philosophy what the postmodernists such as Foucault came to express in their texts.

Gaby Weiner (1994) also writes of the vanguard role that feminists had in challenging the modernists’ epistemological foundations. In questioning the way in which the modernists wrote as if they spoke for all people about the truth of events and history, and reality, and scientific knowledge, feminists introduced doubt into the claim that modernist epistemology was objective and neutral and universal. Increasingly feminists objected to the distorted representations of women, noting that the interpretations and values placed on women’s achievements and abilities reflected the partial perspective of men, anxious about losing the comfortable sides of their lives which women catered for, and, anxious about having increased competition from women as we moved into the public arenas. Already Woolf, in 1938, had researched the increasing number of women graduates with suitable qualifications to join the Civil Service, but found that there were still very few of them and even fewer promoted beyond basic levels. It was not women’s lack of ability which prevented their progress, but the discourse that had been constructed about the relationship between their bodies and minds, and about their natural domesticity.

Success is easier for some, harder for others, however equal the brain power may be so...it is quite possible that the name ‘Miss’ transmits through the board or division some vibration which is not registered in the examination room. ‘Miss’ transmits sex; and sex may carry with it an aroma. ‘Miss’ may carry with it the swish of petticoats, the savour of scent or other odour perceptible to the nose on the further side of the partition and obnoxious to it. What charms and consoles in the private house may distract and exacerbate in the public office. (Woolf, Three Guineas, 1992 edition, Oxford University Press, p224 - 5.)

There is an empathy between the methods of feminists’ analysis of patriarchy and a postmodern analysis. In promoting the processes of re-reading texts and discourses that once seemed natural and normal or inevitable, feminists and postmodernists provide classroom teachers with a theoretical framework bound to make some of the most significant changes to education since its development as a freely available and compulsory part of our lives. Neither approach to teaching and learning annihilates meaning. What they do promote however is the idea of knowledge and experiences being provisional, temporary, able to
be revisited. Meaning and understanding are both important, but they are not fixed, they are not prescriptive. They make sense within locations and contexts, and they can be regularly subjected to revision.

At this point I want to return to Foucault's concept of genealogy and explain why I see it as so relevant and useful in the feminist classroom. Rather than looking for proof of the truth of an idea, or for explanations as to why something is as it is, the feminist teacher (I) needs to be investigating patterns and pasts in her teaching and her expectations of education for the reasons that they became established as they did. She needs to notice how for periods of time certain theories and practices set fashions, and established traditions; how at various stages they came to be believed as if they were truths, and correct practices in some absolute sense. We need to draw attention to what effect these perceived truths have on the way in which teachers functioned and on the way in which students believed they should learn. This is where the archaeology and genealogy metaphors used by Foucault become significant and transferable into practical but radical classroom strategies. In debunking the past metanarratives and modernist constructions of good practice and set paths to progress, postmodernism provides a different environment in which learning takes place, a much less restrained environment.

There is a risk in taking on board these new perceptions and undermining modernist thinking, that we will also forget the effects which modernist beliefs had on the lives of people who worked within their constraints. From a feminist perspective in particular this is dangerous. Because while women are helped by the notion that there is no god-given eternal justification for the power of men over women, for the abuse of women by men, we are not helped if postmodernism implies that the behaviour of those men locked into patriarchal ideology had no tangible effect. Although the patriarchal 'truths' are not real, they have generated behaviours in both men and women which affect the lives of women. These affects can not be ignored. They are what women live, in the present and through the past.

Excavating the past for its effects, for its oversights, for the closures it imposed on some groups, reveals for those groups that situations could
have been different. It is not essential or inevitable that they are as they are. Excavation also helps to show what patterns of behaviour we have adopted that are a result of us investing ourselves in what has been constructed for us. Examining our genealogies for what has happened to us, for what connections and lines have been established and which have been omitted makes us aware of the socially constructed nature of the classroom content and of its traditional methodologies.

Let’s take the example of the teaching of reading in our schools. Although there are many very successful boy readers, on the whole in our classrooms we find that girls read at more advanced levels than boys. They read more, in both quantity and range, and they more often describe it as an activity which they enjoy, than do boys. Now, if we excavate information that we have about boys’ and girls’ reading we find not that it is a ‘natural’ quality in girls that makes them genetically better readers, but that there are many complicated socially engineered factors which inhibit boys’ progress and pleasure in reading. For example, reading has been constructed as a girls’ activity, allied to the fact that it is done while sitting down, still and quiet. Boys spend less time in such activities, preferring more active behaviours. In a study by Wayne Martino on images of masculinity in secondary classrooms, adolescent students were asked to respond to an image of a boy sitting reading. They were told that the boy had chosen to stay inside reading rather than go out to play sport. Most boys constructed the boy in derogatory terms as a square, the teacher’s pet, a geek, a nerd. Some feedback said that it depended on what the boy was reading. If he was reading pornography then his masculinity was not questioned, but if he was reading romance then he was described as a ponce (Martino, 1995). Digging out and reconstructing the meaning of boys’ less successful reading development could both radically transform their achievement, and also transform attitudes about the prestige of girls’ achievements as readers. In drawing on such strategies feminist pedagogy can address the problem of boys’ disaffection with reading, and acknowledge the significance of girls’ achievements, and bring about more significant changes to classrooms than a more traditional modernist feminist approach which would valorise girls’ achievements and claim that ‘girls can do anything’ in a rather naive liberal manner, without regard to the
elements constructing girls’ and boys’ identities and experiences, enmeshing them in complex power inter-relationships.

It is important to remember in relation to pedagogy that the role of theory is to transform our practice. Freire stressed the fact that even as we begin theorising our positions, we need to keep our attention on the needs of ourselves and our students in the midst of our everyday lives (McLaren and Lankshear 1994). Lather (1991) comments that theory, to be adequate to the task of changing the world, must be open-ended, non-dogmatic, speaking to and grounded in the circumstances of everyday life. This is the point at which the feminist teacher’s need to create change, to be transformative in her classroom, may override her commitment to many of the postmodern theorists, whose emphasis on fragmentation and endless diversities may inhibit her ability to take action. There is a real danger in allowing the nihilism present in some postmodern writing to leave me feeling hopeless, without enough sense of meaning and significance to be able to act. Both Szudlarek (in Giroux and Freire 1993) and Simon (1992) warn that the consequences of such hopelessness are the loss of an ability to work personally and politically for change, and that our ability to work as teachers becomes futile because there is no point to teaching if we have no way of developing a vision of a better, more democratic future.

So, the dangers inherent in an unmodified postmodernism for feminism and pedagogy are: the tendency of postmodernists to fail to recognise how even though we are both positioned and we position ourselves, we are as gendered people always constructed within patriarchy; the dangers of a descent into cynicism; the problems of trying to make sense in what could otherwise be total debris (Flax 1990); the debunking of practical strategies to use for change; and, the postmodern notion of ‘subject’ which inhibits a sense of agency. We do exist in the world, each of us faces and lives with the effects of oppression and power, with stories to tell, and lives to plan. To abandon analyses of our experiences which help us make sense, or which make us aware of our situations leaves us uncritical and therefore vulnerable to those who have taken power, leaves us who are women stuck with the consequences of being born female. I want to examine each of these points in more detail.
I have already looked at the tendency of essentialist explanations about the nature of woman to be limiting and oppressive. The dangers of such theories were their essentialising of the nature of women, and their lack of recognition of the variety and difference among women. As conceived of by feminists such as Belenky et al., Gilligan, and Chodorow, as well as Firestone, and by some radical French feminists, Cixous for example, it was liberating to articulate the ‘nature of woman’ in the sense of wanting to valorise women and things womanly. The significance of radical feminist standpoint theory was that it helped to establish gender theory and also revalued the specific gender differentiation of women from men. As Sandra Harding says (in Nicholson ed., 1990) such feminist theorising undermined the impression that patriarchy was without a point of view, that it presented an objective understanding of how things are. As Susan Bordo put it, “(t)he category of ‘human’ was brought down to earth, given a pair of pants and reminded it was not the only player in town” (in Nicholson ed 1990, chapter 6). It is a sense of the pants that they wear which many male postmodern theorists, and their modernist counterparts, seem to lack.

It is one thing to emphasise the differences, the specifics, the local nature, the partial and the passing attributes of women (and of men), but it shouldn’t mean that we lose sight of the dominant power dynamics of patriarchy. By using ‘dominant’ I mean the normalising patterns of behaviour which men and women have adopted as we have accustomed ourselves to the patriarchal structure. It is hard to know sometimes whether the postmodern men have been naive or deliberate in their failing to deal with the issues of patriarchy. Maybe their refusal to deal with the power issues of patriarchy is a result of their finding that what patriarchy provides them with is too pleasant to give up, and of their being ignorant of the needs of women to share more of the power regardless of the fact that the nature of that power is very complex.

We need to watch the refusal of postmodernists to admit to the impact of gendered constructions on women’s lives. Feminists have noted that it seems strange that just at the point when women are starting to develop a feminist epistemology of theory and explanation, definition, analysis and celebration, postmodern men have denied the right for anyone to do such a thing, (Nicholson, ed. 1990). It may be that there is a postmodern
‘coerciveness’ (Bordo, in Nicholson, ed. 1990) which inhibits our confrontation of patriarchy with feminism for fear of being labelled essentialist, or explanationists. To argue the need for, the right of women to do some objecting to the patriarchal powers which set us aside, we only need to remind men that, as women since we argue from the sidelines our case is not a totalising one, not a replacement of ‘theirs’ by ‘ours’, but a counter one. Its off-centredness means that it can never be totalising.

Feminists also argue that there is an ambiguity in the refusal of postmodernists to allow ‘women’ a voice, to deny our right to speak of a concern for girls and women as a collective group within education, and yet to call for counter readings and alternative voices to the dominating, universalising hegemonies of power. In strategic and practical terms it is not possible for people to fight hegemony in isolation from others. The collective gendered voices of women have a role in breaking down the dominant gendered voices of men. Collectively there are some oppressions that are worse than others. Within schooling collectives the evidence in terms of participation, variety of activities, use of equipment, achievement in positions and power beyond schools lies so much in the favour of boys and men, and the injustice felt by girls and women about the situation is so strong that I believe there is no longer a choice about whether or not to speak about a pedagogy for women in case it offends postmodernists. Feminists (and I as one of them) in agreeing that there is no one hegemonic male truth and explanation are also asserting that alternative ways of being have as much value as each other.

In being reluctant to settle a meaning on language, events, texts and so on, postmodernists open themselves to the criticism of being nihilistic, cynical, and relativist. Feminists and other radical teachers fear that their own analyses will be dismissed by postmodernists as totally as the conservative projects have been. In a world where truth, values and love are denied, then what is to stop our slide into total amorality (Keller in Cultural Critique, no. 13, 1989)? The difficulty is finding a balance where hope and vision become useful political strategies rather than idealistic opiates, where deconstruction becomes a tool for revealing, analysing and reflecting rather than isolating and paralysing. If I am to develop theoretical perspectives for feminist classrooms, then the theory must
serve the political end, without becoming misleadingly optimistic and innocent. In knocking down the totalising theories that purported to explain various situations, the postmodernists have left us with the danger of frightening isolationism, and with the prospect of being known as different, which can be as terrifying as being ignored (Flax, 1990). The scepticism of postmodernists is valuable only as long as it leads us into reflection and analysis, not into despair.

What this means for me is that I need to re-examine my understandings of the various theories of teaching and learning which have influenced me, to see what they have ignored or focussed on at the expense of other things. Two of the things I discovered when I did this were both quite terrifying to confront. One was that some of my most deeply held beliefs were shaken. The other was a recognition that in many respects I had taught in years of unconsidered blindness. It was these realisations which led me to feel how important it was to take the risk of using deconstruction, with all the chaos it may temporarily bring about. The chaos that resulted was intellectual rather than practical in terms of my own teaching. Trying to grasp what the extent of diversity, partiality, difference, transitional, momentary meanings, multiple meanings meant for my classroom situations left me panicking about how I would have sufficient grasp on the classroom situation ever to help bring about any learning.

It shook the foundation of this thesis for sometime as well. I had set out to define how feminist theory would provide a basis for a feminist pedagogy and make changes in the lives and experiences of girls and women in education. Suddenly, for me the myth of a feminist theory was blown away, accompanied by the concept of a feminist pedagogy. I began to realise that no one idea, no matter how carefully thought through or well-intended, could become the way ‘good feminist’ classrooms should be. In addition it was arrogant to want to bring about change to any body’s life: what change, for whom, by whom would it be done? I had to conclude that it wasn’t possible for one person to take control of bringing change to another person’s life. Perhaps at best it might be possible to present a range of different perspectives and ways of thinking that people could consider for themselves.
I was an efficient, capable teacher, used to success in my classroom, suddenly confronted by the outrageous arrogance of my own evaluation, as well as its unreality. For many months I wallowed in the nihilism of the postmodern reading and analysis which I had done. At this stage, while I am writing, I can look back and say I needed to go through that stage. I learned to be more humble about the status and nature of knowledge and specific kinds of teaching, about the authority of a Ph D thesis statement. But even that sounds smug, as if I have solved the problems. I haven’t at all. I can live with the theoretical ambiguities that all this theorising throws up. I can even enjoy the challenge of balancing the various dichotomies. But how do I construct a classroom practice, or a concept for a feminist curriculum influenced by postmodern thinking? How do I fulfil my commitment as a feminist to bringing about change without creating yet another regime of truth?

I can live with the theoretical dilemmas, but is there a way that with logical, reasonable, sensitive, responsible thought we can work out of the confusion into a radical new practice, (Flax 1990)? Is it possible to live ambiguously? In other words how can I say my thinking is irreversibly changed, and I will always be living with doubt rather than with certainty, while my practice as a teacher has to function within some practical and conventional constraints? By practical constraints I mean those constraints of working responsibly within a reasonable state education system which conforms more or less to the principle of giving every child and young person an entitlement to education. By conventional constraints I mean conforming sufficiently to the commonly held notions of what a teacher does and is like, to the extent that I am able to give confidence to the students I teach so that they will be able to begin functioning in the classroom, so that they will have at least a starting point for negotiating their learning with me. By the time I finish the thesis I may in my conclusion be able to show resolution of some of these dilemmas and confusions. Or I may not, and it may be better that I don’t.

The postmodern notion of the ‘subject’ has contributed to my difficulties outlined in the previous paragraphs. As an English teacher my commitment to the individual learner, and to helping them find their identity and self knowledge, which is one of the central aims of the
English curriculum, was completely scuppered by postmodern claims. *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* is very focussed on a personal growth model, and on the concept of the individual learner finding her or his ‘voice’ through a variety of language experiences. I wanted to help students ‘make meaning’ from their own experiences and their discoveries with language and various texts. I thought it was a way of helping them understand the world better, set goals, and take control of their own lives. From the point of view of an emancipatory pedagogy I saw this as the way for them to live better, more knowing lives. Reading about the debunking of notions by which an individual subject could make knowing progress through life made me feel angry as well as helpless. I try to come to terms with this in more depth in the chapter on the postmodern, feminist English classroom.

Yet as a thinking feminist, with a distaste for either/or choices, for systems of binary opposites, I had to acknowledge the importance of the breakthrough in the ‘death of the subject’. As a woman I play so many different roles myself, many of them still showing an absence of feminist analysis. For example, I hold power in some, share it some, have power held over me in others. My ‘me-ness’ has changed and altered throughout my life. My identity is fragmented, inconsistent, changing, diverse, contradictory. Secure identity and self knowledge are treasured concepts that I have had to give up. In doing so I have lost certainty. I have gained in its place acceptance of the complexity and diversity of my own nature. As a teacher I have lost faith in any one strategy, no matter how good it seems, as an emancipatory activity. This makes it more difficult to take agency, or to hand over agency to students in my classes. Emancipatory feminist pedagogy is a much more complicated activity than I ever thought it to be. Every classroom behaviour becomes a minefield of consequences - nothing is not dangerous!

Patti Lather (1991) summarises many of the points for both the advantages and disadvantages of postmodernism for a feminist pedagogy. She, along with Giroux (1988) and others, cautions against going entirely along a postmodern path. Perhaps the most ‘dangerous’ part of the path is when the language of the argument becomes so focussed on its own constructions and deconstructions that it is as if the injustices of wealth and power, access and acknowledgement are
ignored. In schooling an extreme emphasis on the momentary and single rather than on the representative voice makes the delivery of the curriculum very complex, if not impossible within the constructed constraints.

On the other hand, once influenced by the basic principles of postmodernism, a teacher, I, will constantly keep a guard up against tendencies towards puritanical righteousness about anything, including feminism. Foucault’s essay *What is Enlightenment* (1984) is a brilliant argument for the best in ongoing learning. He writes about the dangers of any statement which sees itself as a final word; he argues against trying to come to closures. We need to be “always in the position of beginning again” (ibid). This is such an educational advance on curriculum development which limits the thinking about learning, which prescribes pre-set outcomes to the learning before it has even taken place, as does for example the New Zealand Qualification Authority’s Unit Standards approach to assessment. My fear is that New Zealand’s current system of accountability through assessment will spell death to an intellectual approach to education, turning not only teachers into factory delivers of canned curriculum, but students into passive receivers of pre-processed information.

The writings of postmodernists have helped us to see things in less unitary ways, and that is important because those visions of women’s communities which have been and are still dear to feminists’ hearts, and to mine, have often obscured differences. We have been disillusioned about grandiose notions of transcendental explanations and solutions to women’s oppressions - rescued as Jane Flax (1993) says from “foolish innocence”. In the classroom we need to realise that our efforts to change or improve the conditions for girls and women have a small chance of having only beneficial results. Many of the students with whom we work will not be in situations where they are able to use our feminist strategies to their own advantage. For example, New Zealand research shows that girls from non-pakeha and non-middle class backgrounds found teachers’ attempts to liberalise their teaching practice, along feminist lines, did not help their learning (Jones 1991).
The most important contribution of postmodernist thinking to feminism is that in questioning the concept of fixed subject positions it 'gave' women the chance to resist the fixing of a meaning and an identity to being named women. We must now ask suspiciously *Am I that Name?* (Riley, 1988) Providing we pragmatically resist endless descriptions of our diversity so that we seem to float in some sort of void, we can as postmodern feminists problematise discourses and reveal how they "conceal their own invention" (Foucault 1974). And perhaps we can begin to work more productively with the individuals in our classrooms and the amazing diversity and differences which they present, by which they are also constrained.
Chapter Four

A Feminist Pedagogy? Indefinable but Imaginable?

We need to know how not to know - how to avoid getting closed in by knowledge, knowing how to not understand, while never being on the side of ignorance. It is not a question of not having understood everything, but of not letting oneself get locked into comprehension.
- Hélène Cixous, *Seminars*

One of the beginning stories for this thesis is set in a staff development session of the College of Education where I work. A colleague of mine, let's call him Norm, was leading a session for the rest of us on learning theory. It was an interesting, well constructed session focussed mainly on contrasting behaviourist theories with cognitive and developmental theories. All the well-known names had been talked about - Skinner, Gagné, Piaget, Bruner, Ausubel, Rogers and others - when a few of us in the room realised that no woman had been mentioned. Norm admitted that there weren't many women theorists, though he bravely tried to mention a few, Montessori for example, while we puzzled, yet again, over the fact that while most teachers are women, most of the theorists, the academics and the decision-makers in education are men.

I said, "I wonder if there is a feminist theory of teaching and learning?" (This was some years ago!) But Norm said, "No, there couldn't be. Feminism is just a social movement which sheds some light on modern society, but doesn't provide the basis for a theory for teaching and learning. You can't base a learning theory on a feminist interpretation of society." He said this with authority. I looked back to the definition we were using for the workshop on learning theory. It went something like this: a learning theory is a systematic, integrated outlook in regard to the nature of the process whereby people relate to their environments in such a way as to enhance their ability to use both themselves and their environments more
effectively (Bigge 1982). I didn’t continue with the argument then but over the next while I reflected on two aspects of what had been said, or not been said, in the workshop.

First, although it had not been stated, part of Norm’s representation of learning theory was his implicit patriarchal assumptions about the nature of learning and the environments in which it takes place. Second, what was missing from Norm’s presentation was any sense of political analysis which might have uncovered the central patriarchal voice behind the learning theories he legitimised, and behind the role he had allocated to feminism.

Norm - true to his name - had been denying that his knowledge was in fact based in patriarchal ideology. At its centre were men’s voices, women’s voices had been confined to the margins, as ‘just a perspective on things’. Totally disguised by this dominant stance was the fact that theories about learning and teaching represented the views of those who hold power in education, and consequently had assumed a ‘natural’ and universal significance. Norm didn’t see the hegemonic boundaries of his thinking, that it was saturated by the dominant common knowledge of male theorists, and that it totally directed, confirmed and legitimised his own practice.

I realised that this was making me feel similar to what Trinh T. Minh-ha (in Alcoff 1989) describes in relation to anthropological studies which she had been examining from a feminist perspective. She says it is:

... mainly a conversation of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’, of the white man with the white man about the primitive-nature man...in which ‘them’ is silenced. ‘Them’ always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless...‘them’ is only admitted among ‘us’, the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by ‘us’... (p6)

When spelled out in such direct terms, the operational power of ideology hits us as shocking. Bourdieu calls the way in which dominant ideologies are self enforcing and protecting, symbolic violence (quoted in Stanley 1992, p96). Hence, for me, the sense of urgency and personal commitment about developing a feminist pedagogy.
Avoiding definitions
In spite of that urgency I have arrived at one of the core difficulties that anyone working with feminisms and postmodernism inevitably encounters. I have a conflict between the desire to achieve pragmatic changes, and the loath to prescribe, or define what those changes should be. In order to help teachers bring about changes in their classrooms one strategy of this thesis could be to provide chapters which describe the classroom practices of a feminist teacher, providing models and guidelines for others to follow. It would be relatively easy to do, yet it would also substantially undermine the philosophical and political basis of the thesis. What I have decided to do is to deal with the problems of attempts at defining, of definitions and definitives, and then turn instead to imaginings.

"Turn to page xx, find the definition of xxx, and copy it down in your book. Then learn it for homework. There will be a test tomorrow." Defining is so, ... well... definite. It seems to take the thinking out of the mind of the learner. The Definer sets the parameters of the problem definitively, establishing the authority once and for all. A definition does not invite negotiation, or revisiting. It normally appears as non-negotiable to those who are less authoritative than its originator; and it may provoke challenges from those who have something invested in opposing its originator. It seems to me to have something untouchable about it, so it is either accepted as it is, or it is destroyed to be replaced by another.

Even if I believed it was possible to define a feminist pedagogy, I would be antipathetic about doing so. Rather than closing down the thinking of others about the possibilities of a feminist pedagogy, I want to expand it. One of the most important characteristics of a feminist classroom will be the constant critical reflection that is occurring within it. An outcome of my work, I hope, will be more thought about pedagogy, not less. Rather than there being one definition which may be accepted, or rejected and replaced by another, I dream of there being as many models of feminist pedagogy as there are feminist teachers.

This is not meant to imply a valorisation of the 'loneliness of the feminist teacher'. I don't think feminist pedagogies are developed in isolation, behind the shut classroom door. No feminist teacher can afford the energy of having to start everything off anew in her classroom. She needs the
support of being in the middle of whatever is going on (Grumet, in Kinchloe and Steinberg eds. 1993), of being part of the conversation of other feminist teachers. Foucault talks of being “slipped imperceptibly” into things. He is referring to the disruptiveness of beginnings, of coming into situations which you have to start off, as if there were discrete experiences, or bodies of knowledge which had distinct beginnings and closings (Foucault 1972, p 215). Feminist teachers desire the experience of inhabiting classrooms where feminism is an already assumed part, rather than considered as some alien, introduced oppositional other.

The possibility of numbers of different models of feminist pedagogy is a necessary result of the myriad locations, differences, and dynamics created by the combinations of so many people in any classroom, in different subject areas, as well as diverse ages, classes, genders, sexualities and cultural combinations. The diversity within feminist pedagogy will equal the number of feminist classrooms that exist. To keep pedagogy alive and critical we have to control a balancing act between becoming trapped within the boundaries of certain ways of doing things, and, allowing our practice to be disrupted by developing insights. We need to make sense of things in a sufficiently permanent way to be able to communicate with each other, share helpful discoveries and establish a sense of how we want things to be, but we must be aware of the dangers of what Jane Flax calls the terrifying fanaticism of trying to impose meanings on others (Flax 1990).

Foucault’s explorations into notions of truth and power led him to distinguish between universal truths and those truths which have been legitimised by their context within a discourse (Foucault 1980). Although he rejected any notion of universal and eternal truths, he recognised and described the power of discourse-specific truths. These are truths embedded by a discourse, especially as it seeks to gain power and ‘naturalness’, through the development of sets of rules (Foucault 1972, p220). These rules are established in a rational way, and made explicit to people. From this basis interdependent relationships are developed across what constitutes knowledge, rights and duties, status and expertise. The experts within the discourse have the power to legitimise their practices, and in turn, in a reciprocal way, others allow them that power and legitimise it by accepting and repeating the practices, thus setting up a regime of truth.
Feminist discourses can and do fall prey to similar patterns or inclinations to establish regimes of truth, to attempts to normalise their domains. The consequences can be traumatic and destructive, especially if those feminist discourses have similarities with 'the master's house'. If, for example, the hierarchical structures of patriarchal discourses remain largely intact within feminist discourses, or if class and race structures remain, then although the contexts are different, behaviours and their consequences remain the same. In "Third World Diva Girls", an essay in Yearning, bell hooks (1991) discusses some of the hurtful put-downs perpetrated by women on each other, even by black women on each other, in power struggles which are often played out in very public domains. In a different context, Alison Jones (1991) discusses the failure of white middle class women teachers to address issues of class and culture within a girls-only school, leaving Maori and Pacific Island girls unscathed in the lower achieving classes of the school.

Towards imaginings

So instead of defining feminist pedagogy I want to imagine it, and to gain in the imagining a "tolerance for ambiguity, ambivalence, and difference and the ability to flourish within an increasingly multiple and contradictory external world" (Flax 1993, p 38). Imagining a classroom at work helps me step back from it and overview it from a wider perspective. It gives me a sense of space and time as I conjure up the scene. Maxine Greene (1991) says we need to move into the spaces of classrooms, into the clearings of teaching, so that we can resist the forces which constrain, or shade our pedagogies. In my imagination I can try something out and then re-run it if I am not satisfied. I am encouraged by the feeling that what happens in this classroom is not inevitable but can be chosen, can be changed, can be reflected on. The teacher of my imaginings has the option of a range of strategies on which she can draw. Through her I can practice things that I am not sure of. I can consider and envisage how they might work.

In this imagining state I consider my own experiences as I plan for teaching. I always surprise people when I say how long it takes me to prepare for teaching. Perhaps they assume that as an experienced teacher I have so many resources at my finger tips that I can virtually just walk into any English class and teach. Instead I find that I spend longer and longer in planning. When I describe to my students how I go about planning I often
use the term ‘rehearsing’ to describe what I do. But in the context of this chapter I realise that is more like an imagining of the class. I see it in my mind’s eye. I hear the lesson. I visualise how the groups will work, or how the structure will be, I imagine a range of possible responses from students. I make lists of possibilities, different options that might be outcomes.

This imaginative aspect to my planning is one key feature which distinguishes my approach, as an experienced teacher, from most of the student teachers with whom I work. They, many of them, have exciting and innovative ideas, ideas new to me which I enjoy hearing about and observing. But what often happens for them, and this is a natural part of a beginning teacher’s experience, is that they become very focussed on their one idea, and of ensuring that it happens, no matter what comes up in the classroom. Later when we are discussing the lesson, whether it went well or not, I may suggest that at a particular moment there was another option or possibility which they could have taken. The option may or may not be better than what did happen. But it is the response of the students that interests me. Nearly always they will say, ‘oh, but I didn’t even think of that’. They may have been aware of it as an idea, but they had become so locked into what they had planned and decided on that they shut out other possibilities. This shutting out happens at the planning stage, unless we start to employ more imaginative approaches to planning.

The same situation and consequences can develop in relation to anticipating management issues. Teachers, all of us at times, lock ourselves into one way of seeing a student, especially if it is someone who through their behaviour is demanding a lot of our attention. Our behaviours become too defined. We immediately frame the person and limit the possibilities of our own responses. A regime of truth is established. Our role is defined, the student’s behaviour is defined, and therefore the possible reactions are restricted. Behaviourist approaches, which bring a kind of technicist emphasis, which seek to frame and limit what happens between people within classrooms suffer mainly, in spite of their ‘fairness’ and consistency, from a lack of imaginative engagement.

In any classroom situation we are dealing with so many indefinables, so many variables that to shut out imaginings from our professional lives is to restrict the classroom to routines and rules, and this mitigates against
practice which takes account of and responds to diversity, ambiguity and ambivalence.

I think it is clear that I am not talking about the fantasising side of the imagination, not about ‘unreal’ or fantastical thinking. Rather, this is about focussing on the ability of the mind to be creative and resourceful, on our ability to conceptualise and consider broader frameworks than those which are usually required by the immediate and specific classroom situation. It is also to do with the need for teachers and learners to be able to understand and use metaphor, which is one of the tools we can use to deconstruct and re-structure our world of learning (Mayher 1989, p 83).

There is no such thing as automatic meaning. Even language is unreliable in that a word does not automatically convey the same meaning to all users of it. Categories and labels and definitions are not immutable givens, but symbolic representations which derive meaning only as our imaginations work to structure their significance to our experiences of the world. Unless teachers understand this unreliability of language we can make assumptions about the effectiveness of our teaching that are quite false. We often assume that the words, concepts and understandings we use will match the experiences of the students, and therefore also match the possible interpretations that students are able to give them. We can only interpret things on the basis of our previous experience, real or imaginative. This is why the canonical and transmission model of teaching is so inappropriate and ineffective. The thinking processes of the teacher, the selections and connections, the gaps and absences, the imaginative links which the teacher has made are assumed, and not necessarily matched to the experiences of the learners. We need to imagine learning and teaching situations where our thinking and selection processes, as well as our methodologies, are more clearly evident than the content of the lesson.

Feminist pedagogy belongs with many of the critical pedagogies in its aim to be transformative. This means that the feminist teacher makes a choice, as both Henry Giroux (1985) and Paulo Freire (1970) have described, to be a change-agent in the school. The classroom of such a teacher aims to enable people to act on the knowledge they gain in order to change situations. A transformative classroom needs to be handled carefully because there is always the risk that our own feminist concerns become coercive. Of course,
unspokenly all classrooms have this coercive element. Curriculum statements whether in state or independent school systems are designed to impose a certain world view on students. However because this view is never openly acknowledged, because it seems like ‘common sense’ its agency goes largely unnoticed. Only those whose approach seems to deviate from or contradict the ‘common sense’ are identified as politically active or socially-engineering.

Since the common sense notions of the neutrality, or at least the desired neutrality of school curricula, are so pervasive, teachers who work to change things are placed in a difficult situation. Quickly identified as activists and consequently closely scrutinised in their (our) practice, we need for both safety reasons, and for ethical reasons, to imagine strategies which will enable students to reflect on their learning and the knowledge they are encountering, and which will give students a sense of owning their learning, rather than being coerced into it. But even a teacher who stands outside the common sense curriculum finds it difficult not to succumb to the seductively easy tendency to operate the power of the teacher, and not to be complicit in our classroom behaviour with undesirably coercive practices (LaDuc, in Sullivan and Qualley eds 1994).

So, let’s imagine a situation where a teacher works to avoid coercive behaviours, where she tries not to privilege any particular view point over another, including her own. I think the first evidence that she was succeeding in this endeavour would be that she made her own thinking processes obvious. The second would be a willingness to teach the students critical strategies with which they can deconstruct heuristically the teaching methods and the content of the texts that are used. John Bassett (1995) has observed that the explosion of knowledge in our lifetime has left English, and other curriculum areas, less certain about what content should be or even could be taught. No subject has a final end or particular outcome in terms of content, rather its importance is to promote intellectual and educational activity.

A third sign would be the teacher’s openness to presenting genuine complexities to the class. At the beginning of any learning phase it is characteristic of people to feel that they have limited options. It is often tempting from a teacher’s point of view to simplify the issues, to restrict the
options so that learners can have a sense of not being overwhelmed. The
down side of such an approach is that the restrictions imposed are teacher-
chosen, and the issues involved are often simplified, or left unquestioned.

I will use an example in relation to reading fiction. Traditional teaching of
reading has always begun with the idea that a text contains meaning, and
the task of the reader is to uncover that meaning by reading accurately,
closely and carefully. Reading has been assessed traditionally by checks to
see that the reader has understood the text correctly. The correctness is
measured by the exact accuracy of the reading such as the recall of plot
details, setting, and style. But it has also been to do with understanding the
themes correctly, with getting the right ‘message’ from the text. Both
exercises, establishing the textual accuracy and understanding the message
of the book, are exercises in simplification and in hegemony. Before the
reader has had a chance to interact with the text a dominant reading has
been established as the appropriate one to be discovered, or uncovered.
Standard theories or techniques have been applied, as if there is an
understanding to be reached (LaDuc 1994).

Many classrooms are now beginning to explore different approaches to
reading. Students are asked not just to predict or identify with the events in
the story, but to question how those events have come to mean what they
are most frequently said to mean. Readers are asked not to identify with,
but to problematise the situations of the text, and to reframe them with
different perspectives and from different locations. We can imagine
classrooms then where it is not a matter of what the story means but why it
can be read in a particular way.

Texts are described as incomplete and fragmentary. It may seem
as if all the meaning is in the ‘words on the page’, but this is
because readers have learnt to produce detailed readings from
only bits of the text, or textual fragments, by filling gaps between
fragments. (Mellor, Patterson and O’Neill 1991, p 4)

Subverting, or resisting certainty like this is difficult for learners and
teachers and yet unless we do, no matter what our theoretical and political
position may be, we perpetuate the coercive and transmission modes typical
of traditional classrooms. If a feminist teacher wants her practice to be one
in which diversity flourishes she must proceed by exploring problematic
situations with her students rather than by persuading them of the efficacy of her position.

One way I can do this in my own classroom is by discussing the areas of a text with which I have had difficulty working, and by inviting students to share similar concerns and difficulties which they faced. We can frame questions where the answers are many rather than single, and in grappling with such questions students can learn how to distinguish among different kinds of answers or responses. We look at why some of the responses may be more acceptable to us then others. We can examine the motivations, or our locations which lead each of us to favour one proposition rather than another. We are more likely to become aware from this sort of exploration of meaning that our own readings will change over time. And most importantly, the messages will be reinforced that the processes of learning are more important than the particular outcomes, and that they are life-long. Imagine such a classroom!

The strategies which develop such learning processes apply experiential learning theory which has many guises for classroom teachers to use. One such strategy comes from the work of Dorothy Heathcote, a drama in education specialist (Wagner 1979). Heathcote uses drama to help students learn and understand human experiences from the inside out. She works on establishing belief in an imaginative leap which the students are prepared to make. They do not need to experience a situation 'for real', but her method of inviting them to take on a role consciously and enter into a created situation allows them to feel like the expert, or the defeated, or the courageous or whatever characters the created situation throws up. This particular use of role play is nothing to do with acting a part, it is not intended for an audience. It is a learning experience, using imaginative belief to stand in the shoes or the situation of someone else.

There is something else of importance which can emerge from this approach to learning. As a feminist teacher, I want to be able to distinguish between accepting everything as equally valid, and appreciating that there are different perspectives on things. Through entering a role we may come to understand the behaviour of a character without accepting or approving it. We can use belief, or the imaginative leap methodologically to extend our understanding of alternatives or of behaviours diverse from our own.
Similarly it is more important for me as a teacher to help students understand the perspectives I hold and how I came to them, rather than to push them on to the class for unquestioning acceptance. In spite of our best efforts our teacher-position privileges our opinions.

In approaching learning from a holistic position the feminist teacher will try to use all the learning tools available, drawing on the emotional, the cognitive, the psychological, the social, the gendered, the cultural, and the imaginative faculties. And in working towards changes in the learning experiences and long term outcomes for girls, imagining and dreaming will be a significant part of the conscientisation or consciousness-raising process of a feminist classroom.

Sharing dreams can be a risky process. It is personal, it asks people to go beyond the immediate and the experienced to the possible. It involves re-imagining and re-conceptualising. But if a teacher is able to handle it carefully I think it can be a successful tool to enable a class to consider alternative ways of working, without giving them the feeling that they are being coerced.

Let's imagine beginning a programme or course by focussing each student's and the teacher's attention on their long term, not short term goals. We might ask what we imagine in 5 or 10 years will be the things that we want to remain with us as a result of having experienced this course. We might consider what we see as barriers to our best achievement in the course. We could also focus on what our strengths and particular interests are. From the point of view of feminist pedagogy such strategies link the personal and the political and the pedagogical, and they also set up a sense of learning for change, a sense that learning must be active, conscious, deliberate, not passive and receptive.

If a feminist classroom is to function without coercion, yet with conscientisation it will need to engage the teacher and the learners in both personal and pedagogical exchanges, sharing dreams and directions, acknowledging pasts and the power of genealogy, opening up the learning experience to the imagination, to a sense of possibilities and opportunities while still recognising the impact of the contexts of the learning environment. I think this is a way of drawing attention to issues that are
important for learning, and important to feminist teachers, without inhibiting the flow of conversation and interaction.

Feminist pedagogy has to live with paradoxes and contradictions, because alongside the non-coercive and conversational nature of a feminist pedagogy lies the practical imperative for change. How much longer shall we women wait ‘gently’ for changes to come in a system which appoints 32% of women to primary school principalships in New Zealand, though women make up 76% of the profession (Education Trends Report, July 1996, Ministry of Education)? Feminist classrooms need to be able to use what Virginia Woolf in *Moments of Being* (p 83) called the “shock-receiving capacity” which precipitated her into activity as a writer. Maxine Greene refers to the phenomenon of disruption as a vital factor in our coming to realise the need for change. She asks us to look at those moments in our lives when we temporarily had our anchorages removed, causing us to reach beyond where we were (Greene, in Sullivan and Qualley eds 1994). One of the things that will urge us on to change or to demand changes, is being (made) aware of what is lacking, of what our hungers are, and naming these lackings. The link back to the thinking of the previous paragraphs is the need to combine the emotional and the intellectual faculties so that we can feel, and understand, and problematise the situations in which we find ourselves. But the difference is that we also need to work to move from conversational awareness to productive action. The pain that women and different minority groups feel must be kept awake sufficiently so that it is not easy to accept a hegemony which denies us our differences.

There is a use for pain in struggles for change, not in some perverse fatalistic way which suggests that only if you have suffered can you understand, but in the sense of acting as a catalyst to move us on from a situation where we have begun to find a comfortable, ‘it’s the way things are’ kind of torpor. The passive complicity of the powerless with the powerful is a more complex and negative response to oppression than a constructive use of pain to catapult ourselves into active resistance. The feminist classroom will contain painful encounters. These encounters will include dealing with texts which exclude or denigrate the experiences of women and other oppressed groups. They will include the conflicts brought about by resistance to feminist thinking. They will include the anger of
women who are beginning to demand the right to their difference. Feminist teaching needs to find a way of confronting these difficult situations, and maybe having to accept some of the alienation which results. But the most useful contribution that a feminist teacher can make is to be able to keep dialogue going among the dissidence, and to be able to provide for the safety of students to deal with the issues. The feminist classroom itself can not liberate its students, but it can help them find out how to go along their own paths towards a more just share of and participation in the cultural opportunities that are offered.

Layers of meanings
Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the feminist classroom will be its propensity to use metaphor. Metaphor helps us establish a relationship between what we think we 'really' feel or know as 'true', and what we are not sure of or what we can’t as yet understand. In other words through metaphor we can imaginatively play with or engage in situations, meanings, relationships which we might otherwise find difficult to relate to, cope with and understand. These metaphors can be used to disengage students from actual situations where anxiety or animosity, or lack of knowledgeable experience might inhibit their skills and desires to interact with a learning situation. For example, the experience of meeting new language could be such a situation. There are many different ways to deal with meeting new words and concepts. We can make connections between the new word and previous knowledge. These might range from using a phonics approach, to being able to employ a dictionary, to relating it to similar words. All of these are technicist approaches and the word is filed in our computer-like memories awaiting the tap of a key to release it. Such strategies are useful and common every day experiences.

But for new words to have their full working life in our language development they need to be more than added to the list of our known vocabulary. We need to be able to employ them in multi-layered ways if we are going to have the full use of them. A straight forward point? Rather obvious to us? And yet, when students struggle with poetry, or when students in one subject area struggle to transfer their listed vocabulary to another, do we recognise that what they are struggling with is not necessarily a lack of language, but a far too intense trust of the face value of
language? What they need is to believe that they can distrust words and disrupt their obvious and surface meanings in order to explore other possibilities. I see this aspect of language development being crucial right from the beginning of language learning. It is the start to learning, from the beginning, a distrust of the ‘naturalness’ of perspective and locatedness of any text, including the single word text. It is the beginning of exploring the possibilities of the imagination, and the possibilities of the worlds and the words which we experience. All of us as learners and users of language need to be explicitly taught about this, giving us critical awareness of the metaphorical possibilities of language.

I want to work with an example of how layers of metaphor can lead us to deeper understandings of texts, of how we can extend metaphors through role play, into different understanding of the play of roles in our lives, and into our ways of interpreting our lives.

Many examples now exist to help teachers and students deconstruct texts, to disrupt the reading of them in various pre-engagement strategies, to re-read them using different standpoint and critical theories (for example: Showalter 1978, French 1982, Mellor et al 1991). Such strategies have helped us in dealing with important texts of our cultural heritage which could either be seen as racist, class-ist and anti-woman, or which because of their status as literary texts remain unquestioned for their ‘truthfulness’. King Lear is a useful example to look at.

This is a play which sets masculine and feminine principles in binary opposition to each other. The idea is clearly established that as long as men and women act according to their ‘natural’ principles all remains well with the world, but if people begin to act outside these principles, then ‘all hell breaks loose’. It may be that Shakespeare himself was questioning the establishment of two opposing principles in that he dares to allow his characters to step outside their constraints. At least in doing so he is imagining the possibility, even though the results of the action of the play become too horrible to bear.

We see a king, Lear, attempt to fulfil his dream of giving up his position, in a democratic sharing of his power by distributing his kingdom among his daughters. But the dream is too innovative for the world the characters
inhabit. Lear himself is flawed by false notions of pride, by misjudging the natures of his daughters, by not having thought through the consequences in material and emotional terms of his actions. Goneril and Regan have neither the natural aptitude for nor the necessary training in governance. Cordelia his youngest and most beloved, for all her natural talents, lacks experience and the generosity of a more mature spirit. Act one, scene one gives hints from which we can imagine scenarios of the characters’ younger days with which to pre-engage ourselves with the text. Using these clues a teacher can work with the class in pre-reading activities to prepare imaginatively for the dilemmas which the characters will face: a favoured and petted younger sister, the bane of her older sisters’ lives; a foolishly fond father-king used to having his absolute way in both his private and his business life; structures, systems and conventions in place which cultivate rivalry and distrust; an unmitigating political and physical environment in which the characters have to interact.

If, before we encounter the text with students, we establish some metaphorical contemporary counterparts to the circumstances of the play, we will be able to set up a range of possibilities from which to read and interpret the characters and their actions. The antipathy which usually dominates the reading of Goneril and Regan will still be present. How could it not? But it will sit alongside the realisation that their feelings of jealousy about Cordelia are ones with which we feel complicit. The fact that the suitors whom Cordelia’s father had sought for her were eminently more prestigious than either of her sisters’ rather unpleasant husbands was just one last straw in a lifetime of playing second violins to her virtuoso performances. It will sit alongside an understanding of their reasonable annoyance at their father’s general unpredictability, especially his boisterous take-over of their households. It will be tempered by an understanding of how unprepared they were as women for their sudden propulsion into responsible, public life.

I think this gives an indication of the importance of using imaginative leaps into the shoes of characters to help us read differently. In this case it has not been necessary to go beyond the clues that Shakespeare leaves us to work with. Although in my view, it would be justified to do so in texts where it was necessary to reveal the gaps that a writer may have left, or to reveal the limited frame that he (or she) may have deliberately chosen to use.
But we can also use metaphor as a way of exploring 'post-reading' strategies for a text. Traditionally we have looked at plot, structure, theme, character, style, imagery, setting, genre and so on as the conventions for reading deeply, for finding meaning and significance. I do not deny that these features of English literature classrooms have brought significance to the study of texts. But they do tend to behave as constraints both on alternative readings or interpretations of texts, and on the variety of ways of exhibiting responses to the text.

What say we were to look for a way of exploring our reading of King Lear which catapulted us into the development of a different kind of text, using some imaginative strategies. I want to propose that after reading King Lear with a class - a reading which would contain a range of different reading strategies, including the use of staged readings, and viewed readings - we plunge straight into looking at the characteristics of the texts of radio talkback.

The first thing to do would be a study of the texts of radio talkback, to develop an understanding for how they work, and to establish criteria for what seems to constitute successful talkback in relation to a framed radio audience. Then we would prepare for a talkback radio show in which the content we used would all in some way contain or be connected to King Lear, though in the radio talkback the play would never be directly referred to. Students would be required to use components of a traditional study of literature such as plot, structure, or theme as elements of their talkback. For example, character work could be exhibited in the talkback by a group of callers who either took on the personality of a character from the play, or raised the issues which were the concern of a particular character. It is obvious that the themes of the play could be reflected in the issues that people chose to raise for the radio show. Another group of students could use the imagery of the play in their calls to the radio station, translated into appropriate modern colloquial language. The talkback hosts could variously take on the role of different characters in the play and respond to the calls consistent with their reading of one or more characters. The structure of the play could be explored by callers who undertake to tell a scenario using similar structures to one in the play, and so on.
A large class could be divided in two. One group undertakes the study of talkback radio, and prepares to report back to the class about the nature and characteristics of talkback. The other group prepares to participate in the show. Then while that group performs the show, the first group listens, to assess the show in terms of the criteria they have established for successful talkback, and or, they listen in order to identify the ways in which the talkback group have represented different aspects of the King Lear text.

The purpose of imaging and employing such strategies within feminist pedagogy is that they enable readers to see that texts are not immutable, nor are they authoritative. It is not a matter of understanding them, or identifying with them, or accepting their status as great, or not great works of literature. We can use them as metaphors to explore more deeply our own relationships with issues, characters or events in our own lives. We can enjoy them as language texts, rolling the words around in our minds and on our tongues and appreciating how writers can poetically craft language. We can use them to develop our own texts with which to explore meaning and the complexities of our own identities.

This is a major shift from traditional literary theory which has been more pre-occupied with producing readings of texts and attaching meaning to them, which usually have privileged particular social interests. A conventional feminist reading would do the same thing, attempting to explain and pin down a particular significance which reveals and seeks to transform patriarchy (Weedon 1987).

In emphasising the metaphorical status of any text such as King Lear we are asking the readers, teacher and learner, to engage creatively with the text. It does not undermine the text, it only undermines any attempts to fix a particular meaning to it. It elevates the reader and the reading process from passive reception, to creative authority. It energises the teaching because the responses can not be exactly anticipated, nor are they likely to be repeated. Since meaning is not permanent, but provisional, teaching literature becomes a creative, innovative activity. It is not that meaning disappears, but it is revealed to be transitional. In a sense it is written by or on the body of the reader. What we become focussed on is not a meaning, usually someone else’s, usually someone of authority, but on how meaning can be developed. We begin to understand where a meaning gets its base from,
what a meaning reflects and how it has effects. We shift from being recipients of dominant readings to being contributors to the ongoing life of a text, to the vitality of the reading process.

Feminist pedagogy, whatever processes and strategies it chooses to use, comes from a position which does not (yet) represent common experience. When teachers state their feminist perspective they are often perceived by their students as biased or aggressive. For example, I received feedback from one student of a year one Education course that I seemed to think my feminist position was an acceptable alternative but it certainly was not to him! It is not uncommon for feminist teachers to find that students are uncomfortable when feminism is declared to be part of the classroom agenda (for example, Ellsworth 1989; Gore, in Luke and Gore 1992). Of course it is read and heard as an oppositional voice. It feels awkward, even threatening. When we are setting up a feminist classroom the pedagogy has to be ready to take this into account. It will represent a discourse that is an alternative world view from the one usually understood as a basis of the classroom. In any case we are “embodied, traditional, historical, embedded creatures....and our will to change is circumscribed in all sorts of ways” (Fay in Biott and Nias eds 1992, p 141). Making changes to classrooms is slow work, and it will be carefully developed pedagogy, rather than personality or even changes to content that will make the difference.
On good authority?


At the moment two ideas are a problem. One I think is resolving, but it is to do with the issue of feminist authority. I have two problems with the idea of taking feminist authority. One is the contradiction between the two terms. Feminisms are trying break down the ideas of hierarchical difference, especially any hegemonic view of correctness. Yet in order to make the changes that feminisms assert are needed there must be a sense that as feminists we know something is not the way it should be. In wanting to make changes to ‘the world’ I don’t want feminism to be simply a repeat of what was before, but with different people sitting at the ‘top’. I expect that our concept of power, our sense of values and valuing will be different. Recognising the abilities of someone, celebrating their achievement, needs to be done in a way which does not leave others powerless. Let’s take the teaching/learning environment: the feminist (woman) teacher must take a position of control, of management, of facilitation in the classroom. She will take the initiative, she will bring to the situation expertise and experiences which others in the class won’t have. She is expected to do that, she would be mocked if she did not live up to that expectation. However every learner in the class will have things that they can contribute. It seems that at the same time that she, the feminist teacher, presents her own knowledge, experience, expertise she must also draw on ways in which what the students already know can be connected to what she is expert in, and she must have ways in which she participates in the learning environment of the classroom. Her authority is simply a tool for gaining increased authority for all the participants in the classroom.

Maybe this is the point to bring in the other problem that I have with authority and feminism. Perhaps it is a redefinition of the word that I need. Yet is it possible to do that? - to take a term we all have such clear meanings, significances for, and change it? Maybe if I use it in the sense of the right to know, the right to experience, the right to have access, the right to be courageous (in the sense of the right to speak one’s mind by telling what is in one’s heart); in other words as authority to, rather than authority over. But is that possible? Can you have the right to, the authority to, without having power which will exclude others who don’t have it? maybe all this is indulgent nonsense again, because there really aren’t any answers to these problems, just a variety of pleasant (that is slightly less dogmatic) ways round them, as long as we are careful.

My other issue is that of making use of what we understand girls and women to favour without being guilty of implying that they are destined by some essential nature towards that predilection. I can’t work with this just now, so I will have to address it tomorrow!!
And tomorrow it now is, 16th March, 94.

Some of the most helpful work about dealing with the classroom issues, albeit tertiary Women’s Studies classrooms most of the time, springs from the pens of Carol Gilligan, Margot Culley, Lyn Mikel Brown and others including Annie Rogers whose article Voice, Play, and a Practice of Ordinary Courage in Girls’ and Women’s Lives I have just read. They are very productive writers with many major publications in notable journals and also significant books. However without being totally universalist - that is they do acknowledge difference, variety, positionality etc - they are nevertheless inclined to essentialist statements on which they base their work. Rogers for example is writing about the way in which adolescent girls lose the courage from their voices which they had as pre-adolescent girls. They are more assertive in their ‘natural’ state before they are increasingly subjected to the barrage of media and socially sustained views which put women into subjection - the quieter voice, the sweeter nature, the compliant attitude, the smaller body. Rogers argues that we need to find ways of helping girls to keep their more forthright younger inner ‘real’ selves, their courage to “speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart”.

Yes! I scream in agreement, of course we must. I am sick of quiet meek women in my groups, and sick of hearing my feminist colleagues complain of the assertive boys in their classes claiming all the class and after-class energy of their teachers, their women teachers, their feminist teachers! Rogers et al are also responsible for a lot of the research which shows the tendency of girls to respond positively to certain types of teaching styles and learning activities, to group work, collaborative work, internal assessment, open ended questions and discussion. Whereas boys tend to prefer, even flourish in test-like situations, in competitive environments, with information delivered to them, rather than questions asked. The 60 Minutes programme two Sundays ago demonstrated this sort of ‘difference’ in girls and boys learning styles; and a man in one of my feminist colleagues classes the other day called out wearily and a little aggressively, “But we’re sick of group work now”.

My problem with this, although I see it and experience it myself, is that it is based in ideas which suggest that there is a woman’s way of learning, which is different from a man’s, and that there are essential, polarised differences between men and women. In practice these things have occurred, have become the everyday experiences we deal with, yet theoretically speaking, and as a basis to work from for change, for more radical fundamental change, we need to work to help people, women, find their own many-faceted, multi-positioned voices which contain some male-gendered behaviours, some female-gendered behaviours, some behaviours which may be influenced by their sexuality or their culture, their class or their race.

A post-structuralist argument would not want to work with these ideas of a woman’s way of learning/teaching/speaking etc, yet in teaching
situations at the moment it is clear that many women and girls have accepted, bought into it (as both the victim and the perpetrators?), and behave as if this is 'the way it is': that is girls are like this, they learn better this way, they are better at writing and reading, they have less initiative etc etc. So, I have to take that as the prevailing environment, the current status quo, the way things have become. But show that it is not a foregone destiny and therefore inevitable for the future too. That it can be changed, indeed it must be changed if women are to be able to make the maximum of their opportunities in teaching and learning within the schooling system.

Mmmmmmmmm!


I want some record of both my enjoyment, appreciation and yet my anxiety with reading Sue Middleton's new book Educating Feminists. I find that there is so much to identify with, appreciate, feel at home with. Yet there is the irritation with so much of her own story being told. I know what she is doing and why, yet I want all the time to intervene with her personal story and say that is not the case every time. Of course she might reply, that is exactly what I intended. I want you to be resisting my writing! But where do we draw the line between allowing a reader into our writing and at the same time forcing them to think, respond for themselves. Is she deliberately keeping the reader distanced? Can we ever know? Or should her writing have indicated that was her intention so that I could have known what she was doing? I resist her account of her early teaching in secondary schools. I know too her anger with institutionalised discipline and rules. But I never found the teaching as distasteful as she did. Now, am I deceiving myself in my memory, or did I have better experiences than she did? Or was I such a stern young teacher that I subdued my students? How can I ever know the answers to those questions? But I do know that I built a reputation as a teacher who (perhaps unwittingly?) made her students think about "things" that seemed important to them at the time. We had 'moments' in the classroom. Sometime I would like to hear honest accounts of what those times were in the memories of students. Or would I?

Somehow in Sue's writing I would like to hear more joy in the accounts of her teaching. I read the complaints. But then I noticed it too in the Ellsworth article. I am naive obviously in how I teach. Perhaps I leave things so vague and open that there is nothing for anyone to resist.

I am also very curious how Sue Middleton would respond to what I am saying. And I am as always absolutely unnerved by the thought of valuing anything that I write. Or rather I suspect the total indulgence of it
Chapter Five

Am I That Name? Becoming a Feminist Teacher

Those (feminist) classrooms were the one space where pedagogical practices were interrogated, where it was assumed that the knowledge offered students would empower them to be better scholars, to live more fully in the world beyond academe. The feminist classroom was the one space where students could raise critical questions about the pedagogical process.
- bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*

In *Teaching to Transgress* bell hooks (1994) celebrates teaching, drawing attention to its frequently overlooked importance. She briefly outlines her own experience in classrooms, remembering with passion her vibrant early learning days when she was taught by black women teachers who wanted to change the world for their young students. She remembers with sadness the dull days of senior high school and College where professors seem to consider teaching the least of their important duties. She explains her commitment to setting up critical and exciting classrooms when she became a teacher herself. She suggests that while the teacher will always remain the important catalyst in every classroom, if we want teaching and learning to matter, students must also be expected to take responsibility for the outcomes of any classroom programme. She attributes feminism, critical pedagogy (especially Paulo Freire), and her own experiences as a minority black woman with being the major influences in her development as a radical teacher.

It is probably because teaching has been seen so much as a woman’s profession that its potential to change the world has been overlooked, despised even, by those other professionals who consider their work to be more important. Yet I would argue that it is precisely the fact that teaching is in the hands of women, especially if they are feminists, which gives the
teaching profession its potential to be “the most radical space of possibility” in society (hooks 1994, p12). If women begin to use their mushroom-like “soft fists” to insist, to nudge and shove, we may “by morning,/Inherit the earth./Our foot’s in the door” (Mushrooms by Sylvia Plath).

In this chapter I want to explore the characteristics of a feminist teacher and how they will work to help her create a dynamic, liberatory classroom. These characteristics will affect the learning, the classroom environment, the interactions and personal relationships of all the members of the classroom community. I will begin by telling the story of my own evolution as a teacher, as I gradually allowed my feminism to influence what happened in my classroom.

In my case looking back I can identify five stages or shifts in becoming a feminist teacher, but I am not suggesting that these will be the same stages for other feminist teachers. Nor do I want to imply that these stages are clear cut. Changing awareness is not as simple a process as I am setting out to describe. My use of the different stages is meant descriptively not prescriptively. Sue Middleton (1993) has extensively explored the coming-to-feminism of teachers, and demonstrates that there are many different paths and phases on the way. Perhaps I should say that from the beginning my classroom exhibited some characteristics which I later came consciously to name feminist. Particularly I think my classroom took account of the whole person, in that my own teacher education and especially the philosophy of the New Zealand English curriculum encouraged us to take account of the language learners’ needs and environment. The teaching of English was not to be just for academic ends, but for the life-long ongoing development of the student. This was made clear in The Statement of Aims: English forms 3 - 5, the national curriculum statement for English teaching in secondary school which was influential from 1969 when it was first being developed, until it was replaced in 1995 by the new national curriculum statement for all levels of teaching English, from J1 to form 7. I did not separate my person, nor the persons of the students from the learning and teaching. I was engaged with the learning. I involved myself in it and related it to my own experiences, and I expected that my students would look to do the same. Louise Rosenblatt’s reader response theories (1938) had influenced my
development as a teacher as did the developments in using student talk, and students’ own experiences for writing (see for example, Stratta et al 1973; Britten 1970). What we talked about, read about and wrote about had to matter to us. We, as teachers, were encouraged to expose affective as well as cognitive responses, as well as to draw on them in our students’ work. It was not a matter of indulging our moods in the classroom, but of allowing our emotional and affectionate sides to be visible to the students. I eagerly took to this kind of teaching. I loved my subject, and I loved the students. Their behaviours, enthusiasms, energies, and angers touched me. I enjoyed them. Of course sometimes they annoyed me too, but they mattered to me, their responses in the class mattered. I am talking in the past tense not because I mean this isn’t still true today of how I relate to my adult students who are training as teachers, but because I am thinking back to my early years teaching before I named myself ‘a feminist’.

What wasn’t feminist about those days was my failure to notice the patriarchal basis of the pedagogy and curriculum, and my failure to identify girls and women as a group who had been left out, or at best assumed to be ‘just the same’ as the boys and men. I was a modern liberal who believed in a rather wishy-washy notion of equal rights. Teaching in an all-girls school it was rather easy to shelter ourselves from noticing the worst examples of patriarchy. Girls did ‘everything’ as the slogans of the early women’s movement encouraged. I think it was being given responsibility for the drama programme which opened my eyes consciously to the realisation that if the women’s movement was going to make a difference, we (I) needed to do more than assume everyone had equal opportunities.

I was a modern teacher of the 70s, and I felt that it was only right that the girls had opportunities to interact easily with boys. So I broke with the lengthy tradition of the girls-only drama group and initiated an integration with the nearest boys’ school for our major production. But over the summer as I sought for a suitable play I was outraged by the few plays that offered boys and girls equally good parts. Up until my ‘innovation’ the girls had had the opportunity to play all the parts and do all the back-stage work. Suddenly there were hardly any exciting roles for them, and the boys had volunteered for and ‘naturally’ got all the interesting technical backstage jobs! We eventually found ways round the
problems by commissioning our own plays, and by having the boys as ‘guests’ in the production, and insisting that the girls were in all departments of the production. (It worked in everything but the lighting area.)

The important thing for me, in this second phase as an emerging feminist in education, was the realisation that equal opportunities for girls would only be achieved by constant, active vigilance, and by pro-active initiatives. It wouldn’t ‘just happen’, and girls and women, including me, often allowed their roles as equals to be put in jeopardy by conforming to expectations of conventional stereotypes. The changes that feminists had to make within education promised to be uncomfortable and would require us to take stands on issues.

The third stage for me at this time was the emergence of literature about the experience of girls and women in education which made me realise that my concerns were not just local and particular. ‘Out there’ in the wider community other teachers were noticing similar situations, albeit different particular circumstances. Research was emerging from people like Dale Spender (1978 onwards) about classroom interactions which meant we could no longer remain innocent and naive about the situation, or unaware that there were socialising forces that prevented girls from taking their places and spaces in the classroom. We had clearly moved from a position of being able to blame individual girls for keeping quiet or not taking the opportunities available to them.

Part of the role I saw myself needing to take on was that of cultivating positive and alternative images for girls and women, of making sure in classroom discussions that we avoided only stereotyped interpretations of texts. I vividly remember discussions about the character of Tess in Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* and spelling out that I considered the so-called seduction of Tess by Alex D’Urberville to be a rape. It didn’t seem to have been said before in the context of the school classroom, and it made a profound difference to the reading of the book by those 7th form girls. I think the most important thing for them was the realisation that it was possible to notice the gaps and silences of texts, and to explore alternative readings. Feminist literary criticism helped to transform our teaching of literature, both in the strategies we began to use, and in the
difference it made to the content of our bookrooms and what we offered as reading opportunities to students. It was the beginning of my own learning about the strategies of deconstructing texts and situations for their absences and prejudices; and about realising that I had a responsibility to teach those strategies to my students.

This led me into a much more political phase as a feminist teacher in the sense that I began to examine structures and systems of the institutions within which I worked. I can remember joining in teacher union working parties to collect information about schooling, and to monitor school policies for sexism. I became very concerned in particular about the opportunities for girls to see positive role models in their school surroundings. At last I was beginning to name my feminism and take some public responsibility for it. This brought some of my most challenging teaching experiences into being. Lyn Mikel Brown clearly challenges feminist teachers to be prepared to be what they talk about. If we raise feminist issues in the classroom we need to be aware of the importance of our own behaviour for the girls whose consciousness we have begun to raise:

Yet, since part of what ... girls struggle with has to do with their critical observations of the behaviour of female adults themselves, those who would engage these girls in honest relationships have to be willing to honestly confront themselves as women and as teachers - that is, to consider their own value assumptions about being female in a male-defined society and what it means to educate girls for success in this culture. (Women’s Studies Quarterly 1991, p66)

The final stage for me, and it leads on naturally, has been a more recent acquisition. It has been the assumption of responsibility for feminist issues wherever I work, and being known for that. I try not to assume responsibility on behalf of others, but I make it known that I assume feminism will be taken into account whatever issue we consider, in the classroom and in the life of the whole institution. I state that this is my assumption when I begin to work with a class. I locate myself as a feminist, taking responsibility as Carol Gilligan (1991) suggests for being ‘out’ as a feminist.

The shifts in my situatedness as a feminist teacher have been quite significant. I have moved from noticing some particular incidents and
individual circumstances and being concerned about them. That act of ‘noticing’ within my own personal experiences was an important starting point, and gave impetus to the next stages. The conscientisation process came when my personal experiences and observations were strengthened by being seen as part of a larger societal picture, and then translated into collective and political action. The last stages have involved understanding the significance of using theory to transform practice, and finally claiming ‘that name’. As I encounter different circumstances and new learning experiences I possibly run through some of these stages in miniature, adapting and adjusting, reacting and reflecting in the process of understanding more and differently about becoming a feminist educator.

The rest of this chapter will be looking at some of the issues that arise for a feminist teacher in the equivalent of my final phase. How will she (I) deal with possible contradiction, conflicts, and complicity within the traditional pedagogical world of her (my) classroom? Is it possible to be both feminist and teacher, or is there too great a confusion between the expectations of both roles for us to be able to sustain the position?

**Can we be good authorities?**

I think we have to acknowledge that there will always be ambiguity surrounding the effort to work as a feminist teacher. At the same time it would be worse to allow those inherent problems to prevent us from trying at all. When I became a teacher I understood that my role was to take responsibility for the learning of the classroom community. Since as an undergraduate student I had never been much more than average myself, I did not have great confidence in my ability to be the most knowledgeable person in the classroom. Particularly this was true when I first began teaching in the environment of a prestigious academic girls’ school where I was always aware that many of my students were more gifted academically than I was. By taking responsibility for the learning of the classroom community I intended that neither my own weaknesses nor my strengths as a learner would inhibit the learning of my students. I also saw that this responsibility meant setting up situations - structural, emotional, intellectual and environmental - which would allow the students to focus on their learning as opposed to being distracted by other aspects of their lives, to feel safe enough to be able to experiment with
their thinking and their acting, and to feel that they could make progress and achieve a kind of learning which made sense to their lives.

Even in my politically naive days as a young teacher I had an instinctive sense that there was an inherent power automatically handed to me as a teacher and that if I was to make constructive, not abusive, use of that power I needed to focus it in the organisational part of my developing pedagogy, rather than in the management (that is disciplinarian) and epistemological areas of my classroom praxis. Of course I am not sure that I always succeeded. For example I believed that my students felt that I was on their side (not in an over friendly way) in the sense that I trusted them. I know that I had confidence in their ability to succeed, that I wanted them to enjoy their learning. Yet I think there were times when their sense of my expectations of and for them put pressure on them not to ‘let me down’. I remember with some regret a few occasions when the real distress of a student came through because they felt that they had not met my expectations.

How do we deal, as feminist teachers, with the issue of the authority role of the teacher? There seem to be at least three aspects to consider. One is allowing the inherent authority in the role to dominate other elements of the teacher’s role; another is if I let elements of my human fallibility dominate; a third emerges when we try to use our authority for ‘good’ reasons.

It is very difficult to escape the inherent authority, because it is little to do with the individual teacher and more to do with the relationship of the teaching community to society in general. “Lifted from history, motives, and politics, the look of the teacher is endorsed with an authority that disclaims history, motives and politics” (Grumet 1988, p112). General acceptance of this view is also to do with the expectation that knowledge is basically channelled and funnelled between the external world, represented to the learner by the teacher, and the student. Moreover there are certain appropriate language genres, of which the teacher is expected to be the model, that are used to control the nature of the channeling and tunnelling. Formal, transactional, expository prose, written in the conventions of ‘standard’ English, is the one which still dominates most of the senior curriculum in schools.
It is very difficult to shake teachers' commitment to this 'common sense', informally established, contractual relationship with the wider community. The teacher who does not conform to it is seen as a subversive element, and not necessarily welcomed, even by students since most of them tacitly subscribe to the status quo. This is a very noticeable phenomenon in working with pre-service and beginning teachers. Not only does their own experience of being taught within this contractual relationship act as the dominant model shaping their development as teachers, but even if they do set out to challenge it, the students whom they encounter on teaching practice sometimes will take on completely oppositional behaviours in response to attempts to manage the classroom differently from the pattern established by the regular teacher.

The inherent authority applies not only to the standard of behaviour management which the teacher establishes, but also to the status of the teacher as the one who is knowledgeable. It authorises the knowledge which the teacher represents, and presents in secondary ways through resource material, selected activities and assessment procedures. So acceptable is this authority, so established is its rightness, that those teachers who attempt to present a different pedagogy can rarely be seen as viable alternatives.

Among 'the dinner party group' for example, who met to discuss aspects of my work on feminist pedagogy, were several people who had gone back to university for postgraduate work and included in their study a course on feminist issues in education. They described their experiences in the course as among the most challenging of their education experiences. It was not only that the ideas they were working with were challenging, but their experiences of the way the class was run forced them to reinvent their roles as students, and to reconsider their own roles as teachers. The lecturer negotiated the curriculum and aspects of the assessment with them, and included in the assessment was credit for leadership as well as participation in the classes. But the fact of the students having to take responsibility for the classes meant that the role of the lecturer also changed. She refused to take exclusive responsibility for the development of the knowledge experiences of the class. These women, all mature and experienced teachers, understood what she was doing, yet something in
them wanted her stamp of authority on the course. She was a gifted teacher and they wanted to ‘sit back and be able to appreciate her’. Instead they contributed to the teaching and learning themselves, and in the long run, as one of them described it, they worked harder for that course than they did for almost any other. The risk is that teachers using such strategies will not be acknowledged as oppositional equals to teachers who simply pass on the traditions of their disciplines. They will be described as deliberate, if not dangerous, ‘social engineers’, failing to uphold the conventions of the profession. An inherently authoritarian teacher fails to alert students to the political nature of his or her approach in the classroom. Of course. Because to do so would be to draw students’ attention to the relationship between passivity within the classroom and preparation for non-participation in the policy-making of society at large. Dewey went as far as to say that those who passively carried out the instructions of someone else, or who were unable to develop their own meaning from their learning experience, were no more than slaves (see Sidorsky ed. 1977).

As a result of our discussions in the dinner party group I wrote, in the journal I was keeping for the group meetings, the following reflection on my own concerns about being an authority as a teacher educator setting up the start of the year for my new student teachers.


*What kinds of power do my students have? At the moment I would say that to a large extent my students do not have much power. I would defend myself by saying such things as*

• it’s the beginning of their teacher education so they don’t know yet very much about what they need to know. Or,

• I am trying to provide them with a sheltered environment where they can gain self-confidence, where they can safely try things out, so I am being protective of them. Or,

• I want to guide them quite specifically away from ‘bad habits’ of teachers from their past, and to build them up sufficiently to withstand examples of unreflective practice which they may see in classrooms. Or,

• the time they have before their first section is so short that they need me to provide some possible paths for them to try. This has to be done quickly and efficiently in five weeks.
So, these reasons mean that:
1) I have set the agenda for the first teaching block, without negotiation
2) While there is at least about half the time spent in groups and workshopping, there is quite a lot of me talking to the students, facilitating, deciding, ordering things.
The power the students do have is
1) the opportunity to discuss, to challenge, But do they use it enough, and if not why not?
2) the programme was established from the beginning, so they do know where we are going, and they have been invited to contribute ideas.
3) increasingly they do more - hands on.
4) they have their journals to express their views.
5) they know my expectations, values, location
6) they have an invitation to talk to me, to ask me, and to say what they feel they need.
7) I try to watch that they do each have the opportunity to contribute.
But is this enough? What more could I, should I offer them?

Are there ambiguities? Yes, I am sure there are especially since at the end of the year they are dependent on me for references and support in job hunting, - even though in terms of their contribution to the classes they are an extremely participatory group, so I guess they are not covered by me, they are very funny, open, teasing, there’s a lot of humour, risk taking. Maybe it is because I have been open about my agendas, and I say make your own choices. However I am their teacher...

Are there any ways out of these dilemmas?

............

When the feminist teacher steps into her classroom and states her position she will immediately be identified as an oppositional agent. The inherent authority of her role as teacher will be undermined by her declaration since it will be seen as a challenge to how things are. Her statement is one which signals that she will question and disrupt the selective knowledge of schooling. She is automatically plunged into an ambiguous situation. Inherent in her own position is a challenge to the constructed order, yet she will need to establish at least a reasonable amount of order and take
on a kind of authority so that her classroom will be able to function, or else total anarchy could well take over, or even worse, subtle unstructured domination forces will begin to emerge.

Among these subtle forces may be the teacher's own fallibilities, her professional weaknesses, and her own human and personal limitations. She (I/we) may be inclined to quick temper, to touting favourites, to inconsistencies. She may be limited in the number of strategies on which she draws, weak in planning programmes, uncertain in management situations. Any of these factors, coupled with the ability of some students to dominate others, attract undue attention to their behaviours or affect the learning culture of the classroom can contribute to a clandestine change of the power structures within a classroom.

If we begin by recognising the possible ambiguities of the feminist teacher's position in the classroom, and the possible human frailty factors, there is still the challenge of finding a way to work towards a kind of teaching which is empowering without being imposing. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) doubts that we will ever able to escape the imposing kind of authority. Her argument is that the education project is essentially paternalistic, and that there is an inevitable imbalance of power in any learner and teacher relationship. Even the concept of the teacher working as a learner within the classroom context, understanding the learners' situation and difficulties so as to all-the-more-effectively help them develop towards what is obviously considered a superior status, is patronising as well as paternalistic.

Ellsworth makes her remarks in the context of her criticism of the limitations she sees in the work of many proponents of critical pedagogy. In reflecting on her argument Stanley (1992) agrees that she is right about us not being able to totally eliminate teacher authority because the teacher always has some alliance with the institution, but he goes on to argue that we at least have some choice about better and worse ways to operate this authority. I agree, and I believe Jennifer Gore makes a compelling argument about it being worth the effort for feminist teachers to attempt to exercise 'power-with' the students rather than 'power-over' them (Gore 1993). Within a feminist framework Gore expresses the hope that women teachers might be able to construct a different concept of how power and
authority could be employed. She urges a rejection of the binary proposition that is commonly put forward where power is said to be equivalent to being male which is bad, whereas lack of power is said to be the position of women, making women vulnerable. What is problematic with such a binary concept is that it simplifies power into a corruptive influence which is manipulated by a few (mainly wealthy, white men) over many (particularly working class women and other disenfranchised groups). It fails to recognise that power relationships are always present in very complicated ways in any social grouping, like schools and classrooms. We can not divorce ourselves from them. We need to be able to learn how to use them to advantage, and not leave people, particularly women, with the belief that power and authority are somehow incompatible with womanly-ness, let alone with feminism. Adrienne Rich (1979) has argued that we do ourselves and our students a disservice as women, especially as feminist women teachers, if we are not challenging as teachers, if we deny ourselves the authority and the authorship of our expertise, our experience, our skills and our perspectives.

Perhaps the authority of the feminist teacher can be claimed by thinking of the discourses of teaching and of the epistemology as narratives, and by seeing the learning processes also as narratives. The authority or authorship then lies with the narrator and with developing the ability to narrate or represent the experiences, as well as in developing the skills to ‘read’ or listen to the authorship of others (Gore 1993). For women and girls in particular this being taught to write and read about themselves, and to value their own voices and texts is not easy. Women have been denied access to female experience, and taught to devalue those things associated with being women. Patriarchal educational systems in assuming a normal and universal male figure have given women and girls access to knowledge only through man’s experience of it.

The primary task of women teaching women (and men) is to enact a language and an art in which we all can converse as ourselves and in which the intellectual and emotional in each of us remain in the conversation. (Pagano 1990, p131)

Experience on its own does not lead to authority (Luke and Gore eds 1992). We need to play what Peter Elbow calls the doubting game with all the material we attend to, receptively or actively (Elbow, in Belenky et al, 1986). We need to check that our reading and narrating are what Jean
Anyon (1994) calls useful, in the sense of making “usable recommendations to those who work for a more humanitarian, more equitable society, and, consequently,... (we) will have a progressive effect on society itself”.

**Using gentle fists**

We are probably at the most subtly difficult and ambiguous nub of the responsibility of being a feminist teacher: how to be womanly, nurturingly, femininely authoritative; how to use the gentle fist; when to ‘bully’ on behalf of others? Maybe Madeleine Grumet has an answer when she challenges us to be less philosophical about the issues of power and more empirical about it (in Kincheloe and Steinberg 1993). In other words instead of wise words about the nature and justice of power, we need active analysis of the classroom in terms of who has power, how they have managed to gain it, what they do with it. So it is not a case of being polite or impolite, of choosing between bullying or not, but of confronting, observing, demonstrating, making everyone aware of how they are functioning in the classroom. Unless we are challenging people about their powerful or powerless behaviours, and demonstrating alternative uses of power, we only end up condoning them, and that is not acceptable within a feminist pedagogy which is about helping girls and women gain the will to change their learning and teaching experiences.

In an earlier work *Bitter Milk* (1988) Grumet considers issues of curriculum and the role of women teachers within the institution of schooling with a clear feminist perspective. By writing herself into the text, not arrogantly or intrusively, but personally and concernedly, she allows us to know something about her as a teacher, about her values and priorities, and about her roles as a mother and as a professional. She asks us to promote and model in our teaching an integration of ‘education’ and ‘living’. Through an exploration of the history of women in teaching she reveals another of the ambiguities of education. This one is to do with the way in which men have encouraged women into teaching in order to make use of their ‘womanly virtues’ or ‘natural attributes’ in dealing with children, yet once in the classroom the women were told to curb these skills and take on a universal teacher persona - the cool, firm, untouchable, unemotional disciplinarian, the purveyor of objective knowledge of the ‘common’
curriculum. The successful classroom in the beginning period of public schooling was not to be like a nursery, rather it was to be like a military system of straight lines, single rows, with orders given and obeyed.

Grumet, grateful that in spite of this so many women have remained in teaching, urges us to radicalise education and its results by overtly focussing on our womanly qualities and applying them in the classroom. She advocates the use of affection and emotion, a greater awareness of the role of the senses in learning. She says there is far too much silence in classrooms, and not nearly enough engagement and expression of feeling. We need touch, speech, opinion, noise, sight and insight as crucial parts of our classroom repertoire, and I agree. She writes of the usefulness of conflict, questioning and difference within the learning environment, and she sees that women with their insider/outsider status in society are especially suited to the radical nature of what teaching and learning should be. She describes the connectedness that women have between head and heart, and the way in which they are more readily disposed towards holistic learning. In dwelling on the mothering qualities of women she explains how women teachers readily extend aspects of the family, or the familiar, into the classroom setting, mingling the public and the personal aspects of education with relative ease.

The importance of Grumet's work lies in its assertive, practical implications for the need of women teachers to promote and advocate their work in the classroom, and to get on with asserting the important aspects which their 'outsider' position brings, especially with acknowledging the constructedness of the classroom's environment and the need to read, interpret and deconstruct it, which is more likely to lead to political action for change when it develops out of an atmosphere of critical inquiry. Since we more or less have to live with classrooms which will have a tension between the need for affirmation and the need for critique (Pignatelli 1993) at least they must be based in a climate of respectful equals. Rather than having a programme of righteousness which we determinedly strive to enforce, 'everyone will behave in such and such a way or else...', we should try to use an "informed tentativeness" (ibid p 425) in which we are open to the unanticipated, to the possibilities generated by having a particular combination of individuals present in the classroom.
Like Freire (in McLaren and Leonard eds 1993) and Simone de Beauvoir (in Pignatelli 1993), the feminist teacher will have a commitment to self-liberation, recognising that our own individual freedoms depend on the opportunities that others have to experience their own freedoms. She (I/we) will deliberately be trying to represent democracy, deliberately aiming for a kind of liberation which has a vision of what the world could be like for women. Perhaps this is a basic rationale for the ambiguity of a feminist teacher’s position within a schooling situation. In other words, that there is not one defined and clear way to be a feminist teacher represents the need for each woman to develop her own vision of what she will be like as a wise, mature, personally committed feminist.

**Positioned authority**

For this reason I think part of being a feminist teacher is being clearly ‘out’ about it in the classroom and around the school. I don’t mean that I declaim my feminist allegiance the minute I meet a class, but early on it is important that it becomes part of the classroom talk. As I negotiate my relationship with a group of students, that ‘part’ of me which is feminist will clearly emerge and become part of our agenda. For me it has been important that my being a feminist is not something separate from how I am and who I am, it is not a label attached after, it is part of how I live and view the world. I would not want feminism to be defined by how I represented it, nor for me to be defined by however the students understood feminists to be. When issues are raised I try to explain how when I bring a feminist analysis to an issue what difference it makes. I try to demonstrate how my feminism works, how it is a vital (that is a living, growing, developing, changing, fluctuating) part of how I am constructed as a person and as a teacher. It is not a fixed status, nor a fixed state of mind, but rather it is part of the fluidity of how my understanding of things works and develops. It is an aspect of my continuing learning and growing towards maturity. It is part of my presentation of parts of myself, as a model to the students, of how learning is constantly going on in my experience.

I will give an example of how I see this working in my own teaching.

Recently I was introduced to a new short story, new in the sense that I had
not read it before, and therefore obviously not taught with it before. The title is *The Test* and it is by Angela Gibbs. It is a story from the United States, set perhaps in the late 30s or 40s, in a Southern State, about a young black woman who is attempting for the second time to sit her driving test. She is a maid to a kind, well-off, if not rich woman. Her work and contribution to the household is obviously impeccable and very much admired. Clearly the relationship is a ‘good’ one. The employer is so supportive of her maid that she has decided to come with her on this second attempt at the driving test to boost her confidence. The test inspector is patronising from the beginning to both women in fact, and as the test continues his extreme racist and sexist attitudes to the young woman emerge. Pressured and offended by his remarks she blurts out things about herself which clearly offend his sense of how things should be. For example he is outraged by her declaration that she has a B.A. degree. With the heightened atmosphere which quickly develops between them, and the normal tension associated with gaining a driver’s licence, she becomes flustered to the point of making an error in her driving. To his delight he is able to fail her again.

In this story the racist issues are what probably strike most readers most forcibly. There is no doubt that students who respond to the racism of the characters and the situation will have a lot of material to work with. For this reason once we have read this story in class and begin sharing our responses to it, I take the position of focussing on a feminist reading. There are plenty of aspects to look at, such as the relationship between the two women, the treatment of the two women by the inspector, how differently do we think he might have behaved if race had not been a factor, psychological aspects of the women characters, and so on. I then challenge the class to look at what is left out by focussing on a feminist reading, and ask them to define a position for themselves and point out to me what I have overlooked, what I have overemphasised, what different readings are possible.

The important things to emerge from such an approach are that the feminist readings are important, are significant, make a lot of sense. To some extent they are especially validated because by taking them up myself as teacher they acquire the sanction of my authority. But the feminist teacher and the feminist reading are both seen as having other
things to learn, as being part of a multi-faceted reading of texts. In starting
with a text like *The Test* I am able to take a strong feminist line while
leaving two other equally strong readings, perhaps in one case an even
stronger reading - the perspective of race - for members of the class to
discover and claim the authority of. In other words I provide the
opportunity for an equal conversation to take place among us as a
classroom community. I haven’t ‘hogged’ the strongest position for
myself. The students have an equally strong part of the conversation to
savour for themselves.

When I think back to my experiences with the early women’s movement
consciousness-raising groups, one of my treasured memories is of shared
conversations, of precautions taken to ensure that those discussions and
narratives were evenly participated in and listened to. It is not easy to
transfer such an atmosphere to the classroom - an emphasis and respect
for people’s feelings and responses, a commitment to use the learning
situation to bring about changed conditions in our lives, a questioning of
hierarchical and dominating forces which were clearly evident outside the
group and sometimes emerged inside it as well - but it is important to try.
It is important because the feminist teacher is seeking to change the
learning experiences and the learning outcomes of her students, and such
changes will only take place when the learning environment touches the
heart as well as the mind, and models active reflection and critical
analysis.

Let’s go back to *The Test*, which is situated in the context of things to do
with driving and cars. This context is one which automatically places girls
and boys in an unequal relationship. Boys claim the high ground from a
mechanical and technical perspective. They also claim the superior
position in all the mythology which surrounds cars and driving and
women. They own all the jokes and the ‘garage’ common knowledge and
experience. Even if they as individuals don’t actually possess that
knowledge and experience, they will identify with and benefit from it, by
association. Boys-and-cars equals knowledge, competence and control;
girls-and-cars equals inexperience and the butt of jokes. This aspect of the
story *The Test* is however confounded somewhat by being placed within
the more complex issues of race and class, and psychological elements of
character and relationships. The experiences of both boys and girls can be
related in multidimensional ways to the situations of several characters, the need for the experiences of the central character to be transformed can be perceived from many angles and for a variety of reasons, and so the entrenched prejudices revealed in the story can be deconstructed. Boys as well as girls will reject the behaviour of the inspector. His ‘manly’ authority and expertise with cars is complicated and undermined by his outrageously racist and sexist behaviour. This should lead to a safe and reasonable position from which the class can begin to consider ways of reframing the situation, and to internalise different possibilities within which aspects of the context involving cars and gender issues might be reassessed.

I want to suggest that being both a woman and a feminist in my classroom I bring some of the most radical and unusual characteristics to the teaching and learning process. I have the opportunity to shape a different kind of authority. I see feminist teaching authority being about the growth in authority of the learner, and I know from my experience that I am constantly on a learning edge. I see myself, and other feminist teachers being on the edge of traditional learning as we demand representation and acknowledgement within the academies while at the same time trying to reshape the discourse of teaching and learning, and of what constitutes teacher authority. In not being traditionally authoritarian, my teaching is more about how to initiate effective learning, my own included. I author learning, I authorise the learner.

Yet I also need to keep the insecurity of the learner which Lyotard (1993) claims helps us like children to keep open “the season of the mind’s possibilities”. What we need to be looking for as feminist teachers are points at which we can take some elements of the ways in which women have traditionally been negatively constructed and subvert them to radical purposes and to our own gain. For example, let’s take women’s talk, ‘their chatter and their natter’ and use its mutuality, its aspect of joint or shared interest, its participatory nature, its usually avid listening skills, and use it to transform the classroom discourse which is most commonly almost entirely dominated by teacher talk.

In the programme of teacher education where I teach a new group of English graduates every year I am beginning to see a pattern emerging.
When the students first arrive they bring a great deal of information and experience with them about teaching. They also have a lot of learning experiences as well, but of those they have little consciousness. The first part of their teacher education programme focusses on the teaching side. We discuss ways in which they have been taught, they recognise me as an 'expert' teacher, they focus on what they need first of all to be able to get up and teach when they go on their first and rapidly approaching teaching practice. There is a lot of talk and stories about teachers and teaching. It feels as though they are fiercely watching my every move trying to remember it so that they can use it in their own classrooms. They listen avidly to each other and to me as we talk about teaching, and project likely classroom events and what they could do in different classroom situations. Through this talk, anecdotally and urgent questioning we fill our classroom with experiences and expectations. My aim is for them to name their own knowledge, and to share it. But I am also setting them up as conscious teacher observers. They must watch, reflect on and question everything that I (and their other teacher educators) do. They talk, I teach, and we all critique our experiences. I see all this talking and watching as consciousness-raising, as a way in which the students can internalise a sense of who a teacher is, what she or he needs to know, what skills she or he needs to develop. They haven't yet taken responsibility for being a teacher at this stage, they are just talking about it, and watching. I am facilitating the teaching, and taking a lot of initiatives in fact, but they are doing the talking about it in the light of what they know already, and through their talk they begin develop a vision of how they want to be as teachers. Into this context where they are beginning to know themselves as teachers and to think as teachers I, and their other teachers, can then introduce theoretical work, different models, the philosophical, ethical and political issues surrounding educational practice to broaden their thinking and their options.

I realise I have telescoped this example because my intention is not to describe it as any kind of model, but to show how as a feminist teacher I make use of the classroom talk not just as warm up, to make people comfortable or acclimatised, but as a central part of the teaching and learning. Students need to hear their own voices saying things that are important to their learning, because it is through their talk that they actively begin to shape their thinking.
The importance of focussing on some of the characteristics and strategies which I try to demonstrate as a feminist teacher, who claims 'that name', is to try to show an approach to pedagogy through which the student increasingly gains an understanding of, access to and control of the learning process. The feminist teacher can help the students name and own not just what they learn but the whole pedagogical process. She establishes the place for their talk, she provides a stimulating learning environment, she models different aspects of the learning processes, and she becomes increasingly quiet as the students' talk more knowingly begins to dominate the classroom.
Chapter Six

Getting Personal - a telling friend?

Understanding that eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to be self actualising, that it can provide epistemological grounding informing how we can know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination.
- bell hooks Teaching to Transgress

If feminist pedagogy is to begin with the assumptions that ‘good’ pedagogy requires the involvement of the head and the heart; that learning is not a disembodied situation; that learning is holistic, an engaged, passionate activity; and that each learner needs a sense of personal goals, then the feminist teacher cannot back away from such engagement herself, from relationships within the classroom which are committed and intimate.

“One of the central tenets of feminist critical pedagogy has been the insistence on not engaging the mind/body split” (hooks 1994, p193). This idea which I have been presenting throughout the thesis is what bell hooks argues to be the most subversive element of a feminist pedagogy. Once a teacher dares to go beyond being an ‘objective’ transmitter of knowledge she moves into what is traditionally regarded as controversial territory. “Conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis” (ibid p202).

Giroux advocates that during their teacher education programmes student teachers must come to a realisation that teaching needs a ‘passion and an optimism’ (quoted in Stanley, 1992). John Dewey spoke of learners
need a ‘living motivation’ if their education is to effect important changes in their lives. Echoing in much of the literature about the power of education for good is the language of love - students need a desire for learning, a passion for learning, they yearn to learn; excited students we are told, love to learn. Some of this passion often becomes directed at the teacher, and many students have thrived in their learning because of a private passion harbourd for their teacher.

But the classroom is not the place for exclusive passions between individuals, especially if one of those individuals is the teacher. We need to be able to establish a balance among the different kinds of passion which have existed in classrooms, so that on the one hand students do not have a fear that no one really cares about whether they learn and develop intellectually, but neither do they become locked helplessly into a private passionate relationship with a teacher, either of love or of hate.

This chapter aims to confront the nature of the personal and pedagogical relationships which can develop around a feminist teacher within her classroom and more broadly in the institution where she works. It is important to look at elements such as charisma and inspiration, friendship and mentoring, and some of their opposites such as antagonism and anxiety, as aspects which are likely to affect the teaching and learning within a feminist classroom. I have found it important to develop an ethical framework necessary to preserve a classroom environment that is both exciting, and safe, for everyone. For beginning teachers this is an especially complex area whatever their approach to pedagogy, but I believe the demands on a feminist teacher are even greater. In considering these issues it will be important to keep in mind again the vision of what a feminist pedagogy is aiming to do, the nature of how ‘women’s ways of knowing’ operate within classrooms, and whether or not boys and girls (men and women) will have different expectations of how classroom relationships should develop.

**Passionate knowing**

Many educators, feminists and critical theorists alike, for example from Dewey to Apple, from Belenky et al to Noddings, Greene, hooks, and Middleton have recognised the intensely personal nature of successful
and transformative teaching and learning. Middleton (1993) tells of the impact of ‘inspirational’ educational experiences in her own life and in her book *Educating Feminists* she explains her need to try to keep together the sometimes conflicting demands of her academic life and her personal life: “(o)ne becomes complacent when one lives in one’s head” (ibid p7). Apple (1979) has commented extensively on the way in which increasingly regimented curriculum and teacher de-skilling which divorce feelings from the cognitive leave students less connected and less committed to their learning. We see the results ultimately in tertiary teaching where many students have become so separated from their learning that all they want is to know just what they have to do to satisfy the teacher’s requirements. We see similar results in earlier schooling where teachers run well organised, busy classroom with students doing a lot of exercises and drills but not necessarily transferring those skills over into practical situations. In writing for example, if punctuation and spelling and grammatical skills are taught in isolation, they do not transfer to improvements in students’ writing.¹

Learning becomes transformative when what happens in the class matters to the students, when they are able to transfer the aspect learnt to something vital in their own lives, past, current and/or future. As the feminist teacher models how her own learning, past and current, has mattered in her life, she (I) will be sharing something of her own person, of her own passion and excitement. As the learning needs to matter to the student, the pedagogy must matter to the teacher. She can not be standing back manipulating learning, she needs to be in there, ‘harnessed’ to the work, loving the strain and pull of it, turning it over. In her (my) teaching she models, dialogues, practises. The environment is not neat and neutral, it will be quite untidy, noisy and often a little unnerving. I remember a 7th form class of mine, in 1984. It was a group I knew well, most of whom I had taught before, or encountered within drama. We embarked on an all women writers programme for the first term - Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Sylvia Plath. They were not easy writers to deal with either in terms of their texts, their themes or their lives. Many issues had arisen over identity, success, roles, women as nurturers within intimate relationships, control and power, longings and purpose. We hadn’t avoided any of them, so it was a heavy-going, significant term.
I promised them drama for term 2 which most of them were especially keen on. We started with *King Lear* and then moved to *Death of a Salesman*, not easy material either. But I thought they would enjoy the challenges, and I decided to finish the term with a quick look at a light Roger Hall play. Part way through the term I sensed a reserve in the responses, a reluctance to engage in the way they had earlier on, in term 1. I felt something was wrong. I wondered if it had all been too serious, if I was doing something wrong? I decided to discuss it with them. Was it tiredness, I asked? Winter blues? Too much work elsewhere? Never mind, a lightener was coming up with the Roger Hall, I said, we can enjoy a few laughs and not too much serious work for a week or two, relax a little? No, they replied, that wasn’t it. The trouble was that all the women’s literature in the first term had meant more to them, addressed so many of their own concerns as they thought about their futures, their careers, for some of them their first really serious relationships with boys. Willy Loman, and Lear, and the pathetic middle-aged hero of Hall’s play seemed of little concern to them by comparison. Their burgeoning feminisms made it difficult for them to read men’s literature, they said.

Of course that didn’t have to be the case, but my own awareness and experiences with alternative ways of reading were only beginning to inform my teaching, and so I hadn’t served them well in that respect. There was much more work I had to do to solve those issues. My pedagogy needed revising. But even more significant for me that year was my realisation of how powerful a classroom experience could be when it mattered to the students. I remember a parent of one of the girls meeting me at the Parent-Teachers’ evening and asking if I realised how much the girls had been influenced by our study, and how much of it had entered their lives beyond the classroom with their families and friends. The mother was not being critical, but I could see that for her daughter profound and serious changes had taken place and that it wasn’t being easy. It made me a little uncertain about my approach, and more aware of the need to go about the process differently. I wasn’t going to change the content necessarily, nor would I avoid the issues and the discussion, but I had to be more explicit about the processes that we were using to deal with the women’s literature, and about how to use the effect of the learning in their lives.
I am not suggesting that the power of a personal pedagogy, one that deals with issues both in and beyond our classroom lives, is to be avoided. But as Mara Négrón Marreo so compellingly states in a conversation with Cixous “if we cut open the beating heart ... on an operating table, the pulse is silenced” (in Sellers 1988, p145). There must be protections and safety within the feminist classroom. In addition to raising consciousness we must be able to help our students develop the voice to negotiate their way into the new territory that is likely to be opened up. My teaching of those three women writers, Woolf, Mansfield and Plath was probably done as an adult confident feminist, and I hadn’t taken enough account of the needs of the emerging feminist consciousness in my class, nor of the effect of my relationship with those students.

Reflecting back on that year I can see now that I operated as a teacher who was a feminist, and I introduced feminist content and the beginnings of feminist literary criticism to the students. I used many non-traditional teaching strategies for an academic class studying for their Bursary examination. I never lectured, there was always discussion in response to opened-ended questions. We began with Dewey’s ‘living motivation’, valued personal experience, I shared my own views. I facilitated classes in the sense of chairing discussions, organising their structure, managing the interactions and supplying resources. Students presented their own seminars to standards I was often in awe of. There was a safety within the class in that there was a high level of mutual trust and respect. The girls knew each other well after being in the school together for 5 years, and they knew me and my style. They and I could and did take risks in terms of trying out ideas in tentative ways. Although there was a rather vigorous sense of competition among them in relation to academic achievement, there was a lot of good will and acceptance among them as peers. The all-important Bursary examination was there before us but it didn’t dominate our way of learning and interacting at all, until the final few weeks, of course. Right across the class these girls achieved extremely high marks, several gaining the maximum possible.

In summary I see now that I was using quite a radical pedagogy, particularly in the context of the school, and we dealt with feminist content and there was a high level of personal involvement and consciousness-raising. But it doesn’t represent what I would now call a
completely feminist pedagogy. The crucial element that it lacked was a conscientization about the learning processes. I had not incorporated into the classroom the strategies needed for students to be able to observe the pedagogy. They were not able to frame their learning experiences, and give themselves a perspective on how it all fitted into the rest of their lives. It just happened to them. Because they were in my class and they trusted me, they simply allowed themselves to become engaged with the ideas and the events of the classroom. When I meet them now from time to time, I am always impressed by their subsequent achievements, and I enjoy the enthusiasm with which they look back on the year, especially how it seems they 'had never had to think so hard before'. But I am also slightly unnerved by the extent to which the class changed them, given that I took so little account of what that might mean, and given that I did not provide them with enough tools to deal with any changes that took place for them individually.

I will always argue that a personal involvement in and connection with the learning experience is an essential ingredient in any critical and feminist pedagogy. I don't think quality learning takes place without it. If the current phase of structured learning as implied by the establishment of eight benchmark levels of achievement in the New Zealand national curriculum statements, and the establishment of learning outcomes before classes have even met in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework unit standards system, which also restricts the possibility of developing responsive curriculum content, continues too long we will be in danger of suffocating that essential ingredient altogether. But simply 'getting personal' is not enough. Our students need to know that there is more than one way to tell a story, and the story unquestioned can simply perpetuate itself, or increase its own 'mystification or strangeness'. It is not enough to move or be moved, we need to be able to take reflective action if we are really going to make changes (Razack 1993).

Learning isn't just a matter of shifting cleanly from one position to another. It is not a case of I did not know before, but now I do. Neither knowledge nor knowing is a certain thing. This is where the intermingling of feminist, critical and postmodern theories is so important in the development of a feminist pedagogy. Feminism asks us to think differently, to seek back through our mothers for a sense of who we are,
and what we inherit, and who we can be, and what voice we might use (Virginia Woolf 1929). Critical theory challenges us to reflect on and frame the new knowledge we might gain from such experiences. Postmodernism suggests that we never leave things completely behind us, nor completely change our ways. We are multiply located and implicated, our selves are assembled, not discovered.

Virginia Woolf (1938, p258) is of the ironic opinion that "(i)f people are highly successful in the professions they lose their senses". Not only does she see them as having gone mad, but she also identifies them as having lost touch with that all-powerful side of themselves which keeps them centred on what is really important about their work. She describes them as without sight, sound, speech - in other words without the ability to relate fully to those around them. When teachers lose their sense of being in touch with the knowledge which they are employing, and simply see it as being a product on a conveyor belt then something at the heart of the purpose of learning and teaching disappears. Feminist teachers for whom knowledge has had to be re-thought, re-discovered, claimed, authored and named, understand what a difference can be made to the learning experience when the senses and the emotions and the intellect are all connected; when learning springs from an identified position, through personalised understanding, via critical attention and reflection towards new and usable transferable skills and understandings.

"... (F)eminist pedagogy is not about ‘discovering’ a voice that is already there, but about fashioning one from the discursive environment through and in which the feminist subject emerges" (Fink 1993 pp7 - 27). To me the notion of ‘fashioning’ carries some helpful connotations for the feminist teacher. It can imply a sense of voices being moulded, being constructed and crafted within the classroom. But it can also imply a sense of change, of adaptation and transformation over time, reflecting the both transitory and progressive development and growth of learners as they assimilate the many elements of the learning environment.

Fashioning also carries the notion of a sense of design, of careful establishment of the necessary conditions in which teaching and learning take place. Achieving the optimum conditions for, or contextualisation of learning is a key ingredient making up the style of a feminist teacher.
Kincheloe and Steinberg (1993) argue that such conditions must include emotional commitment because “emotions are seen as powerful knowing processes that ground cognition” (ibid p312). Only when the emotions are engaged can learners become active participants. When so-called neutral knowledge is imparted in a so-called objective teaching style all that results is ideological and intellectual passivity.

It is important for the feminist teacher to balance the often conflicting demands of the ideal classroom: personal, affective, emotional versus critical, reflective, analytical. Perhaps hooks’ (1994) advocacy of ‘excitement’ in the classroom is the key. Excitement engages not just our emotional energies, but contains as well a sense of sharp-wittedness, of keen perceptiveness. It makes us eager, but also open-eyed and watchful. This is what the learner needs and what the feminist teacher needs as well.

**The partial classroom**

Getting the balance even among these attributes of a feminist classroom will help the feminist teacher (me) as I/she works on the all important area of classroom relationships. When a feminist pedagogy begins to replace more traditional teaching styles in a classroom it is intended that changes will take place, that instead of working to universalised attitudes and expectations about students, knowledge and methodology, the feminist teacher will be specific and focussed, and she will work contextually. Her processes and exercises will not be total, and once-for-all. She will not be focussing on eradication of ignorance, but on moments of learning and discerning, on the gradual growth of skills and understanding, as well as on the periods of backtracking and deferral. There may be several different opportunities for learning going in the classroom at the same time, with the same product or objective being reached through different learning activities. In other words the feminist classroom will quite be fragmented and partial.

I have chosen this word partial with deliberate care. I clearly mean to use the word in the paragraph above to signify an approach to the classroom and to learning which is not totalising and homogenous. But the word has another meaning which suggests that something is not only a part of a
greater aspect, but that it is also unfair, prejudiced, it implies favouring one group more than another. Since this is a taunt often thrown at feminist teachers I want to deal with it as it affects the relationships within, and workings of a feminist pedagogy.

We are now well aware of the political nature of all kinds of educative processes, yet still those who are open about their agendas are the ones who receive the most criticism for their approach. Religious schools are obvious examples. They get around the problem usually by privatising part, if not all of their funding, thus claiming parental choice as justification for their partiality. Freire argues that it is not a matter of who is partial, but of everyone being honest and open about their agendas. Every teacher, says Freire, must openly ask of herself:

‘what kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favour of whom am I being a teacher?...The teacher works in favour of something and against something. Because of that she or he will have another great question, How to be consistent in my teaching practice with my political choice? I cannot proclaim my liberating dream and in the next day be authoritarian in my relationships with the students.’ (Shor and Freire 1987, p 46)

It may be that as feminist teachers we need to put another twist in to the issues of partiality and fairness. In other words it may be necessary at times to be partial in order to be ‘fair’. Feminist teachers and researchers have demonstrated on many occasions that boys take more of their share of the classroom culture than girls do. It may be in their representation by the content of the learning, (Alton-Lee, Nuthall and Patrick, 1993). Or it could be in teacher attention, or in the teaching/learning style, for example, Spender 1982). Or it could be in the cultural assumptions of what is normal behaviour, or common experience, as The Test example showed earlier in chapter 5. There is no lack of evidence for making a case that in order for girls to experience equality of opportunity in schooling they need some partial treatment to establish a classroom culture which is comfortable, familiar and representative of their life experiences.

The problem therefore lies not in finding justification, but in developing a classroom style which helps boys and girls, or men and women in adult classes, understand and benefit from the partial approach. My own experience as a teacher has taught me that situations of potential conflict or complication arise when they are not always expected, when students
are not fully familiar with the culture of a partial classroom. I can recall such situations when I have made it known that I bring a feminist perspective to my teaching. For example, we are several months in to a course, the students are familiar with each other, there is a lively discussion going. Unnoticed for the moment is the fact that the men are taking a large share of the discussion time. A woman who for some reason that session is on a quick fuse does notice and rather abruptly draws our attention to what is occurring. Some embarrassment ensues which silences the men, does not enable the women to pick up the threads readily, and throws me off my normal poise. Freire would call this situation an intransitive one in which people are not fully in control of what has happened. They are not able to carry through properly in the situation so that everyone can act thoughtfully and constructively (Freire, in McLaren and Leonard eds 1993, p 32). Looking back on such a classroom situation I can now see that although I had taken one important step as a feminist teacher of informing the class of my expectations and location, I had not gone far enough in enabling the class to understand and be familiar with what that would mean for the whole classroom community.

In order for a partial classroom to work to the benefit of everyone, we must all understand not only the context, but also how each of us has a role in working to achieve the changes we want to bring about. This involves the teacher introducing strategies to enable students to have a way of gaining some critical distance from the specific events which occur so that neither the class nor the teacher can be caught on ‘the hop’, in the sort of situation I described above. Freire discusses a process of desocialisation as being a useful starting point for a classroom which aims to challenge the status quo. It is a process of drawing to the attention of learners the unstated myths, values, morality, and habits which we all bring into learning situations. These unstated beliefs cause us to accept our own behaviours unquestioningly, and to regard different behaviours as the unusual, even deficit. The feminist teacher needs to generate classroom situations where students can question their own attitudes and behaviours in a secure atmosphere which is not accusatory, and where they can consider different attitudes and behaviours with respect rather than antagonism.
Changing the conditions under which classrooms traditionally operate not only involves cognitive and emotional processes, it is a psychological process as well. We need to begin with students’ own, ‘bare’ experience and how that has contributed to their current knowledge and attitudes, and enable the students not to despise or dismiss this experience. Then we need to give them the opportunities to recognise where their attitudes stand in relation to dominant or customary attitudes and behaviours. The final stage is to set up activities and opportunities of dreaming or imagining what it would be like to exist in a utopian situation where we would not be inhibited by custom or prejudice. The result should be that in any classroom situation which looks as though it could be contentious, uncomfortable, or oppressive we can remind ourselves to step back critically and first recognise what our experience of it is, second who is taking the dominant position, and third, what we would rather have happening. The focus would then come off condemning an offender, or being embarrassed personally, and come on to the processes of improving the climate in which we all want to operate.

In classroom practice the techniques which we can use to engineer such a strategy might include using peer reference groups, personal journal writing, having a member of the class regularly observing classroom interactions, playback theatre or stepping into role, a regular speaker’s corner or letters to the ‘editor’ column in which comment on classroom activities can be recorded. Establishing an attitude in the classroom where everyone feels able to express their viewpoint securely should enable a partial classroom to operate successfully.

But there is still the element of personal relationships within the feminist classroom to consider. Let’s look at a possible scenario

The last few boys of the fourth form finally straggle out the door still shouting at each other, and falling over the loose bit of carpet and punching and calling out to me to remember to come and watch them at lunch time in the final of their soccer match. The first few of the sixth form overlap with them eliciting more noise, and what I would generously call good-natured abuse!

"Hi! Mrs R, what’s on today? Are we going on with that poetry again? Shit, I’ve forgotten my folder! Anyone finished their essay? I bet Sarah has? Hey, did you try to read some of
those extra poems Mrs R gave us? Hey Mrs R do poets always use that kind of language? My mum said they used to read much harder stuff than this, in old English she said. Do we have to do old English too, Mrs R?...” and so rolls on the entering chat of my likeable 6th form English class.

While they are still arriving and milling about I notice Lizzie coming towards my desk. “I went to that picture you told us about. It was great!” Enthusiasm pours out of her eyes. “You always recommend good films. I went to another one over the summer. I was thinking we should start up a film group, and you could recommend good films, and then afterwards we could go out for coffee or something, and then discuss them. I love doing that. Hey Jane, why don’t we do that?” she calls to her best friend Jane who comes towards my desk too. Lizzie grabs her arm and says, “Mrs R should set up a film group and we could all go and see films with her and then talk about them afterwards. Or we could get a video and watch them at someone’s place.”

“What’s going on?” asks Greg as he arrives at my desk with a book in his hand. He had said he wanted to show me his favourite poetry book so I assume that is what he is holding. He puts it down on the desk. “For you when you’ve got time,” he says quietly. The girls tell him about their idea and he is enthusiastic. They turn to go back to their seats. Greg trips, not delicately, over Jeff’s deliberately set bag, nearly overturning a desk.

“Jeff, for goodness sake,” I say with exasperation, “put those bags and sports gear away under your desk!”

“Sorry Mrs R,” he mumbles sarcastically. I hold him with a fierce stare until he looks away muttering something quietly under his breath which I choose to ignore.

“Okay everyone, make sure you have got the poems out from yesterday, and also your journals with your comments on whether or not you think these are love poems, and whether you think men or women wrote them.” There is considerable shuffling while everyone gets out the required material and then a quieter moment while they find their writing and look it over.

“Anyone want to start?” I prompt. A few look willing, and I am about to select someone to start when Lizzie takes over.

“Yes, well, I thought that they’re all love poems though they’re very different. And I think it is quite clear which are by men and which are by women. The men’s poems are more about themselves, and the women’s poems are more about the situation.” She is about to go on, but I nod to another student who overlaps at first with Lizzie but then continues solo.
"... but I'm not sure about the second poem being a love poem," she says referring to the William Carlos Williams' poem. "I mean it doesn't seem to be a poem even, let alone a love poem. It's just like a note you might leave for someone."
"I think it's the language which makes it a love poem," says Greg, and he quotes, "'delicious, so sweet and so cold'."
"What's romantic about that?" comments Jeff frowning.
"Well, it's not so much romantic as... sensuous," replies Greg but looking a bit uncomfortable.
"Sexy, you mean."
"What did you think of the poems, Jeff?" I ask hoping to diffuse the moment. Serious for a moment he looks back at his journal where he has obviously done quite a bit of writing.
"Hmm, well I think that 'At Makara' one is by a man, because of the breasts bit, and the 'came' at the end."
"Typical," mutters Lizzie. Ignoring her Jeff goes on. "But one of them was a bit peculiar, that 'Warming her Pearls' or whatever it is. Who's that by? No guy would write that. I reckon it must be by a lesbian or something."
"Well," snaps Lizzie, "what if it is? I think it's the best one of them all." Before I can ask Lizzie to elaborate Jeff has replied quietly.
"Yeah, well that's most probably because you are one." He is looking for my response.

In the scenario we see a teacher who has a pedagogy which shows signs of being liberatory. The students' views are being valued, there has been time for personal response, reflection has been encouraged in the form of the learning journal, the questions are open-ended and exploratory, the teacher is standing back from being an authority figure, and from being the dominant 'knower' in the class. Although there is not quite enough detail for us to know for sure, there are signs that the content of the session has a feminist aim, in that the issues of gender and their implications for love poetry have been raised.

But the aspect being highlighted is that even in a classroom fronting up to emancipatory issues within both the curriculum and the choice of management style, we are still engaged constantly in the interplay of power relations. We can see that although Jeff is never treated unfairly both he and the teacher are aware of a tension in their relationship. He is not a member of the inner circle of students who interact with the teacher in more than a classroom or lesson-focussed way. He is likely to be very
conscious however of those who are. He will have observed Lizzie and Jane and Greg make their impact on the teacher before the lesson formally started. Perhaps his way of gaining her attention is through their regular struggle about where he leaves his gear. Perhaps the tripping up of Greg is another way in which he expresses his displeasure. This scenario doesn’t allow us to answer all the questions, or even raise all that will exist within the dynamics of this created classroom. However we can note that the reasons for Jeff’s disaffection may also include the teacher’s feminist approaches. Similarly the reasons for Greg and Lizzie and Jane to be so positive about the class maybe the feminist context, or the teacher’s personality, or the teacher’s style, or the fact that they are all able and keen English students. It may be any one of these singly, or a combination of them, and it may be different for each of them.

The problem for the feminist teacher in her (my) partial classroom is trying to avoid closure or exclusion for each of her students. I think the most constructive relationship we can build with students will be one focussed around respect for their potential to use the learning situation to question how what they are being presented with makes a significant statement, and what its affects are on their own lived context. There will be tensions and difference and partiality, but as long as everyone is included in the tension, given opportunity to express how it affects them; and as long as they can recognise their own partialities, and respect the conditions which have led to the difference, then at least the classroom can become a reactive, responsive place, rather than a pre-programmed one.

To return to the scenario, obviously there is no one correct teacher response to the issue with which it ends. But there is a great deal of potential vulnerability in the situation for several students if it is not negotiated well. Lizzie may or may not be a lesbian, it may or may not bother her. The teacher may or may not be. But left hanging in the air as a taunt from Jeff, the remark is dangerous. It needs some debriefing. Perhaps since the students are used to using learning journals, the teacher could give some time out while they each focus on the ‘Warming her Pearls’ to explore what their response to it is. Then they could have the opportunity to take Jeff up on his comment. Perhaps other examples of famous gay and lesbian literature could be referred to, alongside some
current cult gay and lesbian figures, or the dealing with gay and lesbian love relationships in popular soaps. Jeff needs to have his remarks taken seriously, not rebuked, and the teacher needs to allow the discussion to take place with as much care as she would monitor other discussions of difference.

In the kind of incident demonstrated in the scenario it is not only the sexual issue that is significant. What is most important is that every character mentioned is somehow responsible for the tenor of the situation. All classrooms will contain preferences, antagonisms, insecurities, provocations, loves and jealousies. When they occur to the extent of drawing people’s attention to them we need to permit them, to give them acknowledgement, and contexts. We can use inclusive narratives and examples in which students can identify themselves. Otherwise they can become problems when the students, or the teacher, are, locked into a situation and lose control over it. It is when people feel out of control or overlooked that they can become almost unstoppable in what they will do to gain attention or make their point. It is the potential for desperate action which we need to guard against, not the tensions or the emotions themselves. A desire to bring about change in the classroom can lead to what McNay (1994) calls creative unpredictability. If we are trying to work in ways which encourage students to feel that their learning really matters, and which develop important intellectual and emotional relationships among members of the class and their teacher, we also need to provide safe and transparent strategies for all of us to use.

... there are directions in which we want to help our students to move, things we know or know how to do that we think it worthwhile to teach, but we need to start - and to end - by respecting the integrity of our students’ lives and minds, not because we have no intention of trying to change them, but because no changes we might help to bring about that violated that integrity could be what we intended.

- Naomi Scheman Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege
Notes

1. The research is conclusive that teaching formal grammar without reference to real writing situations has no effect on the quality of student writing. For example: Braddock, Richard; Lloyd-Jones; and Schoer, 1963, *Research in Written Composition*, Champaign, IL, National Council of Teachers; Brown, Roger, 1968, *Introduction in Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, by James Moffet, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company.; Cazden, Coutney, 1972, *Child Language and Education*, New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston. This is not to say that we should not teach grammar, but that teaching it without regard to application and practice, so that students do not have the opportunity to own it and use it in their own contexts, will not improve usage. I would argue that we do need to teach grammar, very specifically, for the tools it provides us with which to discuss language, and when it is well taught, for the interest it can generate in language study. (See Elizabeth Gordon’s material, for example in *English in Aotearoa* no 15, 1991, “Grammar teaching in New Zealand Schools: Past, Present and Future”.)
Chapter Seven

The Rigours and Risks of Critique in the Feminist Classroom

Inventing ways to problematise the steady, persistent drone of routinised ways of thinking about what is possible is the means by which power in the form of technical control and self-normalising practice can be turned back on itself.

- Frank Pignatelli What Can I do? Foucault on Freedom and the Question of Teacher Agency

I want to examine ways in which teaching critique within a feminist pedagogy will work to make a difference, to produce changes in the lives of women as a result of the experiences in classrooms. These changes will be to do with having access to an epistemology which connects with women’s experiences, with learning the skills which will ensure our access to careers that we choose, with helping us make reflective choices which are actually liberating for our lives.

We need also to remember that any feminist activity begins from the margins, from outside the establishment, on the fringe. Pagano (1990) names it as an “exile experience”. Trying to work from the sidelines is difficult. People see “exiles” as having a distorted view. They can accuse them of not seeing things ‘as they are’. Exiles are not accepted as full members of what ever team is ‘playing’. They/we obviously do not understand what ‘is going on’. Not only is their opinion not valued, but their right to have anything to say is doubted.

In terms of epistemology - the theories of knowledge, that which can be known, which ought to be known - feminist ways of knowing seem like a subaltern knowledge within the dominant knowledges (Alcoff and Potter 1993). In terms of critiquing the epistemology of the school curriculum the feminist teacher stands on the edge saying both that there are other bodies of knowledge which have not been included yet, and that the body of
knowledge which has been included needs to be examined for its ideological, political, artificially universalised and dominating basis; for the fact that it has failed to take into account its own contextualised nature.

Schools and classrooms abound with routines and rituals, traditions and patterns of behaviour which have never been problematised or questioned for their assumptions. These are built both administratively into formal timetables from year to year, and kept alive through informal myth-making networks in the stories passed on by one generation of teachers and students to the next. This is especially true for those of us who belong to the dominant culture reflected in our schools, but even those not reflected in the normalising practices of the school know that in some way our lives are entwined with it, some part of our life is invested in the institutions we attended, and usually at least in retrospect we hold onto memories of the patterns, of the routinised ways to which we became accustomed, whether reluctantly or not, ways which give us a common experience with the contemporaries with whom we shared them. It may be that if we are going to gain anything from our education it is essential that at least to some extent we do invest something of ourselves in the routines and rituals which make up school experience. We need to both identify, and identify with, the school experience in order to have a sense of understanding it, of knowing it. In order to learn about it and from it we need to be knowing. And forgetful.

**Forgetting certainty**

Lyotard (1993) says if we want to bring about change we must do some forgetting. He does not mean forgetting in the sense of pretending that somethings have not happened. That is impossible anyway because of the power of the unconscious, and the way in which different memories become amalgams with each other. I think Lyotard is encouraging a kind of forgetting that allows us to leave something out, or behind, in a way which means that we are not so immersed in an experience that we can’t see beyond it, and around it. It is a deliberate kind of forgetting which allows us to revisit a situation, visualise how it could be different, and consciously begin to work for change. This sometimes happens informally when we share common memories with other people. As someone retells a scene or an event, I am often struck by the way in which we see it quite differently. We will still laugh over the common threads, or cry, but each of us has
experienced the situation differently. There really isn’t a ‘way it was’. The conscious recognition of there being no objective truth or reality in any situation is the beginning strategy of critique and of being able to define our own positions. This chapter is about teaching the strategies of critique as a deliberate political activity, especially if we intend to help students towards self-empowerment, and to develop counter positions and discourses, such as a feminist discourse in education.

It is not easy to change classrooms which sit inside education systems full of traditions and cultural heritage, the discourse of which is predominantly male. The men who work within these systems find it difficult to forget the discourse because it is theirs, it is constructed to reflect them. To forget it would be to lose themselves. And what about women? Can we, should we forget? We have only just been admitted to the educational discourse which although not created by us, we have learned to live within. (Delamont 1989) Must we forget so soon?

The strategies needed for being able to critique any situation do not come ‘naturally’. There is a lot of evidence to indicate that people, many teachers and students, actively resist critique (see for example: Stanley 1992, Ellsworth 1989, Luke and Gore eds. 1992). The power dynamics of classrooms, our embeddedness or commitment to the status quo, preoccupation with career goals and competitive self-interest (Stanley 1992) mean that students and teachers are less likely to be active in resistance or in critical thinking. Even minor revisions can be difficult. Foucault refers to critique as a process which “tests certainty” (in Pignatelli 1993), a concept which is in direct opposition to the 1990s environment of a return to basics, more authoritarianism, unit standards, and competitive pressures among schools.

Critique is not a neutral activity, it is always political. Most educators now recognise that education itself is not neutral; as Plato established in his Republic it is a selected and selective process designed to shape people and society (Stanley 1992). The strategies of critique involve both deconstruction and reconstruction, and embarking on them contains the dilemma that since they do not come ‘naturally’, then the teacher has to impose them! In a feminist classroom placing impositions or restrictions is always a problem. Women have had so many impositions placed on them that it is difficult for feminist teachers to deliberately enforce yet another set of rules on learners.
But there are some ways around the dilemma which I will discuss further on, particularly to do with the teacher being part of the classroom studio-working atmosphere and therefore being subjected to the same impositions as the learners.

If critique involves testing certainty then what are its strategies, and how do we teach and learn them, without introducing another set of certainties? In what follows I will discuss a number of the strategies which I think constitute critique. The purpose of them for me, as a feminist teacher, is to try to break down the students’ dependencies on the teacher, as a source of all knowledge, and on the curriculum as if it contained everything worth knowing. These strategies are related to Freire’s questioning of the traditional pedagogical transmission mode of delivery, which he called a banking approach to teaching and learning. The student is regarded as an empty bank account into which the teacher deposits ‘riches’.

The first strategy looks for ways to enable each member of the classroom community to stake a claim in the learning experiences, to define her (or his) position, background, understanding, expertise. In other words the teaching and learning environment is created to take account of the learner’s needs and experiences. We each need to state where we are ‘at’ in relation to the learning expectations being framed by the classroom. By doing this we become aware of the positions and needs of other students within the classroom community. Whatever significance the learning may have for me, it could be that for another person in the class it is altogether different.

As the feminist teacher encourages all learners in the class to position themselves, she is helping the students realise that they need to approach and respond to knowledge and classroom events with a critical gaze, and not to accept them as untouchable givens. We need to identify what is happening in the classroom, and make explicit to the students the expected encounters, skills, possible products, and the context in which the learning event is placed. I notice that many of the student teachers whom I see on teaching practice do not even, at the simplest level, put their teaching into a context for their students. Often they fail even to relate the lesson’s events to those of the day before, or to anticipate the follow on, the direction of future classes.

Locating ourselves and our relationships to the learning experiences, not only gives a frame and context for the learning. It is also part of the process
of becoming aware that we have a role to play in how we construct the knowledge with which we are presented. From the minute I begin to encounter a learning experience I am already bringing a different shape, or perspective to that learning, which can either hinder or help the learning process. So we need not think of ourselves as locked into a situation because of how it seems to have been defined for us. But even as we enter it, bringing with us all our own positions, we change it, add to or subtract from it. Maybe therefore as we do this consciously, we are able to take it for ourselves and use it rather than be constrained, or dictated to, by it. This is where our liberation may begin (Weedon, 1987).

When student teachers begin their teacher training the strongest influence shaping how they think about teaching will be their own experiences in classrooms as learners. Although novices to the profession they already know a great deal about how teaching is commonly practised. This past knowledge of teaching gives them a framework within which they will have started to think of themselves operating in the classroom. It gives them a sense of structure and familiarity with the situation in which they now have to take a new role. But its very familiarity can also restrict their imagination and their conceptualisation of the styles of teaching they will attempt to develop, and confine them emotionally to highs and lows of their former experiences.

The other highly significant factor about locating ourselves, and identifying the knowledge base and the learning experiences, is that we take away from them, and from ourselves, any notion that there is something innate or given, neutral or superior about them, or about ourselves. Girls and women have for so long existed with our experiences being overlooked that to enter a classroom within which or against which our subjectivities, our contributions and our experiences can exist and have significance would be truly revolutionary (Jones, quoted in Weiner 1994, pp119-120). It is not that norms do not exist. Of course they do, or at least their effects certainly show, and we must be able to recognise their disguises and their regulatory power, and their overwhelming hegemonic appearance of being the natural ways of doing things.

Employing the strategies of critique in our classrooms encourages us to learn in a different way. Pignatelli (1993) talks of teachers and students becoming problem posers. He suggests that learning is not so much about
solving problems, but about asking questions as to what constitutes knowledge, and who authorises knowledge. We are better to continue to work on various problems which will remain unsolvable in any universally acceptable way. We will never find “a right action” (Maxine Greene, in Pignatelli 1993), but partially and within a momentariness, we can each formulate some conclusions. This brings me back to the dilemma faced by the teacher if she/I choose(s) to ‘impose’ the strategies of critique in her classroom. I would argue that if her own questions, her self-positioning is done obviously, it will not be an impositional directive from some invisible ‘on high’ authority. She will have placed herself among the learning community of the classroom. It may even erode the authority on which we teachers have traditionally stood.

Because they are so temporary, nonetheless significant for all that, even the learning outcomes, and the processes used to arrive at them must constantly be under ‘surveillance’. Once they are formulated and gone through, then they will have made a difference, they will have changed our abilities to understand and operate our lives in a more democratic way. So, finally, the strategies of critique have to be noticed for how they have changed our positions, for how they may have caused some subtle changes in our constructedness.

**Revealing strategies**

Having identified some of the strategies which may be helpful in a critical feminist/my classroom I want to discuss ways in which we can integrate them into our classrooms and our teaching practices.

The feminist teacher/I needs to model the use of them herself. This implies revealing her own processes in planning and preparing to teach the class. Sometimes our students are not made consciously aware that we have prepared for our teaching. As an English teacher it is always obvious to my students that I do a lot of marking. But it seems to come as a surprise to them that in fact the greatest amount of time I spend out of the class is on preparation. Because I am an experienced teacher they assume that I have so much at my finger tips that I do not need to prepare. If I ask them to analyse what preparation I might have done for a particular session they find it very difficult, even to identify what strategies I have used. It is so ‘seamless’, they say, so ‘effortless’. If this is how teacher education students are left feeling,
they who are bursting with curiosity and anxiety about different teaching strategies, then how even more invisible must our teaching strategies and processes seem to students in other types of classes. As we give names to ourselves, and to the knowledge we are dealing with in the classroom, so we need to identify and make explicit the basis of our teaching.

As well, we need to discuss the aims of each session, the processes we will ask students to engage with; we need to articulate clearly the new skills we are building, and the outcomes that are being worked towards. There is a slight ambiguity in this process as with many of the critical strategies. In this case the problem with the teacher articulating the aims and skills and anticipated outcomes suggests that there is no room for student negotiation and participation. The suggestion that is being made implicitly is that the learner’s task is to learn the already decided upon classroom goals. In such an environment it is difficult for a learner to become a knower (Loughlin 1993). Stanley (1992) also discusses the problematic issue of teachers setting the classroom goals without involving the students. Perhaps what we have to do is reveal what decisions have already been made, what we have chosen to focus on, and what has therefore been left out. Inevitably the classroom is pluralistic, it serves more than one purpose and has many agendas operating at once. Even the feminist teacher is caught up in this. Her responsibility is to make it transparent, to allow it to be known about, to provide the students with at least as much information as we have (Beckman 1991).

It will greatly improve the position of the teacher as a ‘passer-on’ of the critique strategies if she is involved in the development of the curriculum, if she has an active part to play in her own professional development. If teachers simply accept and apply the work of ‘expert’ curriculum developers beyond them, they become ingrained/chained into a delivery system of teaching, a pass-on-down-the-line approach to teaching and learning (for example see Pignatelli 1993, Lather 1991 and Apple 1986). They send it to me, I pass it on, unquestioningly - education becomes a great chain letter, passed on, unchanged, don’t break the chain, don’t change the message. Something bad will befall you if you do!

Another important way in which the feminist teacher can model the critique strategies which she hopes students will acquire is by discussing her own approach to, success or failure with, the aspects that are taught and learned
in her classroom. I can explain how my preferred approaches to learning make some things harder or easier for me to learn. For some time now this has been a feature of many writing classrooms, with teachers working as writers alongside their students, the student writers have actually seen the difficulties a teacher has with aspects of writing. The learning process is witnessed by the student writer. The student sees that the teacher finds some things harder than she does herself, the learner recognises that by comparison with the teacher, she is in fact an expert in some areas. The power of the teacher is diffused and shared with other learners in the classroom/studio.

Part of feeling the confidence to engage in the strategies of critique is recognising that the learning tasks are ones with which you have some familiarity. Often we are silenced by the feeling of ignorance. But familiarity encourages us to take more part, to be less afraid to interact, criticise and comment. A feminist teacher introducing strategies of critique to the classroom helps the students make connections between the current position of the student and the new area of learning to be introduced. Warm up strategies are used, and access is made easier because people are comfortable, ready.

The feminist teacher needs to be an explicit teacher. She must teach what it is that she wants her students to be able to do. The more common practice in many of our classrooms is teaching by instruction. For example, discuss the issue in a group, think about it more on your own, then write a paragraph. How clear are the students about what constitutes a useful discussion, or a group discussion, about what is involved in thought processes, and especially about how to go about writing a successful paragraph?

If the classroom is like a workshop, or a practising studio, it is more likely that the strategies of critique will be in evidence. As well as the learning activities being taught and modelled, the classroom will be full of learners practising the skills, each in their own distinctive way. This will help to make everyone in the classroom aware of the different possible interpretations of the teacher’s instructions. Observance and sharing of the differences broaden the learning base of the classroom. We begin to realise the range of distinctive possibilities available for accomplishing the goals which have been set. The feminist teacher along with other critical teachers is one who celebrates diverse ways of knowing, and different ways of
becoming an expert. Dialogue and exchange occur in abundance in the critical feminist classroom. It can often be like a noisy and busy market square.

As a feminist teacher practising and teaching critique I need to be alert to those whom I may be silencing, especially with questions or assumptions which may lead to the closure of issues. If I am identified as a feminist by my students they may find it difficult to show opposition to my position. In looking to use an empowering language, or in trying to recognise commonalities among women as a way of identifying our strengths, I must not overlook providing space and time for self-reflection and individual direction. My own programme of critique will do better without an accompanying programme of feminist righteousness which prohibits other ways of being.

Within any state education system even the feminist classroom needs to comply with whatever the summative assessment systems demand. This is another of the ambiguities which face a feminist teacher. But we can help the students become more independent as learners by teaching them processes for formative assessment practices. Being able to be self-assessing is crucial, as is involving everyone in the class in peer assessment. This means, apart from joining in at times, that the feminist teacher needs to set aside classroom time, and to help students acquire the skills for re-visiting and re-vising parts of their work that appear to be weak or causing difficulties; or for assessing the strengths that they are developing. A feminist teacher will be particularly involved in establishing criteria for these activities. The importance of reflecting on not only the achievement of the students, but also on the teaching and learning processes of the classroom, is part of critical and feminist pedagogy.

The ‘real’ life of the classroom
How closely can our classrooms imitate life? And what would it mean if they did? There are both positive and negative possibilities in this idea. The negative possibilities would result in the denial of all I am advocating as a feminist teacher. They would allow the classroom to play along with all the traditions of the society beyond the classroom that fiercely work to maintain the status quo. They would have the classroom imitate a patriarchy, a homogeneic culture which despised and sought to get rid of difference and
challenge. Obviously this is not what I want to explore with a 'life' and
'classroom' analogy.

I am looking to focus on a way that the classroom could imitate life in the
sense of being 'real', real in the sense that it should be less restricted by the
idea that the classroom merely practises for life beyond it. On many
occasions both teachers and students behave towards each other in the
classroom context in a way that they would not do so if they met each other
beyond the classroom walls. Each of us, student and teacher, takes on a
particular mantle when we enter the classroom, and with it a set of
behaviours which more often constrain our learning, or our teaching, than
foster it. Already embedded in our classroom behaviours is a regime of
truth which tells us what to expect from the others - our peers, depending
on whether they are boys or girls, the teacher, the language people use, the
tasks that will be required; and what to expect of ourselves - the way we
will respond to tasks, the level of achievement we think ourselves capable
of, the strength of our self esteem, and so on. In many cases these
expectations and their consequent behaviours differ from the ways in which
we react to situations outside of the classroom, in 'real' life. Especially, they
differ from those situations in which we feel confident and positive, those
situations in which we take initiatives, and ask questions; where we want to
spend the time to problem solve, share common resources, and invest our
hopes and emotions. This isn't true of all teachers and students, but for
many of us, we are locked into ways of behaving as we close the door
behind us and take our place in the classroom, that close our minds against
learning or a style of teaching which might otherwise allow the educational
experience to bring about changes in our own lives. There are many
important reasons for this - perhaps negative previous experiences of
classrooms lead students and teachers to feel resistant to the power of the
classroom, even though the form of resistance they may take leaves them all
the more helpless victims of the classroom situation they are trying to resist.
Perhaps the resistance is a more courageous, chosen act, stemming from an
analysis, conscious or unconscious (and we should not underestimate the
significance of unconscious actions), of the unsuitability of the classroom to
the learner's needs.

Faced with these potential difficulties the feminist teacher has to make
choices. She needs to take on the authoring aspect of the feminist's authority
in the classroom. She needs to begin with critique. As Giroux says (in
Stanley 1992) we need to teach critique not content. This beginning is the point of departure for the teacher in her planning, in her authoritative planning. Her goal for the students is that they become experts in critique, as part of their habit of learning. But to get the students to the strategy of critique she will need to use a content, a content of context. She may begin with critique, that is, it is her approach to teaching. In fact, through stating her aim to teach the strategies of critique she claims her authority to begin.

The students within her class will need a context for learning how to practise critique, for acquiring it as one of their learning habits. It is a habit which requires courage (Young 1992), and I think it is the case that courageous actions are most likely to come about when something matters to us. I agree with Giroux that it is more important to be teaching critique than content, but unless the content matters, and the context relates to things of significance in the lives of the students and the teacher, the sense of urgency required for courage to be present will not exist.

The curriculum of schooling consists of a careful selection of those elements of a culture deemed important enough to be transmitted to new generations. The selection is also made with the intention of maintaining those parts of the culture which reflect the needs and hopes of those who have power, and with the intention of preparing people to take up their required places within the social and economic structures of society. The school curriculum is culturally selective, politically and historically located, and socially constructed, and as such is in need of radical transformation if it is to become something which matters to most learners, (for example see Giroux, Apple, Hamilton, Kanpol, Gore).

The feminist teacher will inevitably find herself positioned on the edges of this selective, established, already ‘set-up’ curriculum, with its pakeha, patriarchal, middle class epistemological basis. She/I, might only have slowly come to the realisation of how alienated she is from its nub. And she should not feel that its nature is her responsibility, nor that she alone is able to change it. The loneliness of the teacher in her classroom is another factor for the feminist teacher to deal with. She will need to find communities of support to make her work easier and more full of hope.

It maybe that before these realisations about the knowledge-base of the curriculum emerge in the feminist teacher’s consciousness she has been enthusiastically engaging with it, identifying with it even (see Alton-Lee
and Densem 1992), doing her best to interest her students and motivate them so that they can each, ‘individually’, achieve their best. After all she cares for the students, and she feels responsible for spending the taxpayers’ money that has been invested in education in the most successful way possible. Her results are obvious: keen, motivated students, eager to arrive at class, still engaged when the bell rings, producing excellent work. It is often hardest to see the areas ripe for critique when there seems to be so much success, and success is very important to a teacher, especially at the beginning of her career when the enormous complexities of the teaching task can be overwhelming.

What is it, then, that makes a change in the perception of a feminist teacher, enabling her, almost with a blinding flash, to recognise her own exclusion from the dominant epistemology? Perhaps it comes in a moment of quiet reflection on the dynamics and interactions of the students in her classroom, maybe from a direct, startling remark by one of the girls in the class who notices the absence of women. Maybe she/I the teacher, makes a connection between what is talked about in her women’s group and what goes on in her classroom. Perhaps an inservice course raises the issues of gender in the classroom, or the teachers’ union introduces a remit on the status of women in the profession. It may be a gradual culmination of all or any of these things. But, eventually, the feminist and the teacher meet in her head, and they begin together to challenge her classroom practice.

To be able to practise a feminist critique in her own classroom the feminist teacher needs this combination of head and heart. She needs to have access to feminist epistemologies, and the personal/political commitment to change. She needs to know the stories, and feel that they matter. Her strategies of critique will then become a dynamic part of her teaching habits.

She is ready now to apply a feminist and critical analysis to the epistemology of the taught curriculum of the classroom. Another aspect of her/my feminist teaching, drawn both from the women’s movement (for example, Chodorow, Belenky et al, Culley, and others) and from other critical pedagogies (such as Giroux, Freire, Shor, Apple), is the strategy of beginning with the contexts of her students’ lives, with what they already know, with their expertise and experience. The classroom must mould to their lives. She and the curriculum are merely the bits of scaffolding on which the learners can begin to construct their own knowing.
Keeping critique safe
What this means is establishing a quality in the classroom discourse which
enables the students to experiment with what they already know, to take
that significant but very risky step of attempting to transfer their knowledge
of one thing, or from one area, to another situation. It asks the student to
reveal aspects of their knowledge, or to be noticed for not having the
knowledge ‘capital’ to draw on. The feminist teacher knows that these are
not the only risks to be taken in a critique-full classroom. The nature of
critique is that even as we speak our knowledge, we must question it.

The problem for the feminist teacher is how to validate the existing
knowledge, experience, and location of the learner, and at the same time ask
the learner to question and critique that knowledge, experience and
location. Critical feminist learning theories which stress the need for a
comfort space, a security in the learning environment, and feminist
postmodern demands for critique of that environment are both difficult
strategies to manage even on their own. Asking the teacher and the learner
to try to juggle both together is asking them to embark on a way of teaching
that is very complex.

It means moving into a kind of classroom space which gives significance to
the learning processes above the learning content. Teachers pressured by
exam prescriptions, by parents requiring top results, by systems demanding
accountability through tangible, measurable outcomes, often find it difficult
to justify, even to themselves, time spent on activities which do not
immediately result in ‘notes in books’. It is often hard, even for the feminist
teacher (perhaps it is even harder for the overtly feminist teacher who is
anyway under careful scrutiny by the school community in case she
‘brainwashes the kids into all that feminist stuff’), to undertake teaching
which spends time uncovering the learner’s knowledge and relation to that
knowledge, and moving the learner into a position to be able to critique
their own knowledge. But the next stage is to present the knowledge-base of
the curriculum framed by its contexts, and to teach the skills of critique for
examining it. Finally, the gaps, omissions, and silences in the curriculum
knowledge need revealing before the learners are able to construct their
understandings, contextualised and recognised as for this time and from
this perspective.
Is it realistic to ask the feminist teacher/me, to undertake this approach to teaching? I find it too dangerous to answer directly with a ‘yes, that is what I expect’. Dangerous in the sense that you, the reader, will perceive the task as too difficult and not even worth the try. I feel safer arguing the consequences of not using critique, combined with learner-based, experiential critical feminist pedagogy. The consequences of critique not being a part of the classroom procedure, even of the procedures of a feminist classroom, are many and I would argue that at least some of them will be significant to people of many political, social, cultural economic and pedagogical persuasions, not only feminists.

If we see the classroom as a community of learners, each already possessed of a vast range of knowledge and experience, no matter what their age, each diverse in how they have gained that knowledge and experience, we must be aware how impossible it is to simply impose a uniform, modularised chunk of unexamined-for-its-context-knowledge on that community and expect it to work for, or be useful to many of them. Teaching and learning in the feminist classroom cannot be imposed on the learning community. As I have mentioned before, Freire has criticised the traditional, transmission of the culture approach to education using the analogy of banking. He sees the teacher passing on the riches of the culture to a passive, yet empty student bank account. It is a vivid analogy to draw, yet as an analogy it has a flaw, in my view. The trouble with the banking analogy is the link with money which we all desire. It seems a generous thing of the teacher to do, to deposit knowledge in a bank account for the learner. The expectation is, that left long enough, the deposited knowledge will eventually accrue interest for the learner. But will it? The purpose of my commitment to critique as an essential part of the learning process is that I believe that learning is not useful if it is passively acquired or deposited on behalf of someone. Unless the material is sifted, examined, reflected on by the learner herself, it will remain inert, and the lessons unlearned. Perhaps we should continue the analogy and imagine that the learner has the capacity to ‘take the riches out’, transfer them to other accounts, spend some or lend some, borrow from other sources, ... .

Uncritiqued learning, whether it has a feminist or a patriarchal basis, whether it assumes a homogeneous classroom or not, is committed to retaining the status quo. It is not about change or recognition of difference. Even if it brings a different perspective, unless it also reveals its
contextualised position, its partiality, and its reflection of the transient moment, it simply swaps one ‘regime of truth’ for another. Unless the self is critiqued and reflected on, along with the knowledge base and methodology of the pedagogy, then even an emphasis on the individual learner can simply perpetuate the status quo, just as much as any other methodology. There is more to emancipatory pedagogy than a set of teaching strategies, a belief in the uniqueness of every learner, or a revision of the content, (Grumet 1988). This is more fully developed in the chapter on the English classroom.

But back to the dilemma. How do I resolve the oppositional nature of a teaching style which accepts the learner where she is, which respects the personal and the individual, yet which demands that she open up to and learn the skills of reflective self-critique? Girls are already battling against the loss of self-esteem in the classroom. Their bodies, their voices, their abilities, their behaviours are constantly subjected to active abuse and harassment, or to being overlooked and discounted. Having lured them into the safe-risk of self-revelation within her/my classroom, how can the feminist teacher turn the rigours of critique on them?

‘...the task of critical pedagogy (is) to invite students to engage the discursive and conceptual means through which they produce the ideological dimensions of their experiences, deep memories, psychological blockages, and passionate investments in everyday life and relate these to the material and symbolic structures of power that operate in the larger context of social life.’ (McLaren and Tadeu da Silva, in McLaren and Leonard 1993, p 75)

A feminist pedagogy that works with the strategies of critique would use similar thinking. It will build on bare experience, enabling the student to use, and not dismiss or despise her experience. She needs to be able to place it in a critical relationship to the dominant expressions of experience; plus, put it critically alongside a strategic and utopian dreaming of what it could mean to live as a ‘fully emancipated woman’.

The feminist teacher must take responsibility for laying out the aims and strategies of her classroom of critique, so that the learners are aware of what will take place. In making their choices of what they will reveal from their own experience, or from their family-whanau background, the learners need time to consider; they need the guaranteed privacy of their learning
journal, for example, which they may use as the place to work out their thoughts and choose what they are prepared to reveal publicly. The classroom must allow for safety and trust.

As part of our feminist strategies we will also commit ourselves to the same processes that we ask the students to engage in. In the context of teaching writing, Donald Graves condemned the teachers who feel that they can walk around ‘fully clothed’ while students perform their work ‘naked’. (Graves in a videoed address to the New Zealand Association for the Teaching of English, 1982.) We must be prepared to involve ourselves in the tasks we ask our students to undertake. I don’t always do everything that the students in my classes do, but I do start off with them, and I do share, occasionally, a finished task with them which I have worked completely through as they have. When it is an important or ‘passionate investment’ that I am asking them to engage in, I must always demonstrate my willingness to take the same risks as they are.

Having begun to filter my teaching practices through a postmodernist gaze I find that working with personal, relevant and experiential material and strategies is not as straightforward as it sometimes has seemed in the past. Simon and Dippo (1986, quoted in McLaren and Leonard, p60) remind us that there can be something very conservative about simply affirming people in what they already know. If we leave learners, and ourselves, content with simply voicing our experiences, we are leaving them and ourselves all the more deeply bound within the status quo. Our uninvestigated first ‘instinctive’ responses to a stimulus or an opening question very often confirm the limitations and prejudices of our constructed lives, and are riddled with imitative clichés both in our thought patterns, and in the language which we select to represent them.

Let me give an example from an activity I frequently use in a writing classroom. There are few New Zealand students who do not have experiences of the beach, either by the ocean or by a lake. So this is a situation I can always guarantee the students will have personal experience of. I begin with large sheets of paper spread around the room, each with a different heading on it. For example: sounds that you hear at your favourite beach spot, or people or animals you often see, the favourite time of day or year for you to be there, and so on. In the background I play some ‘sea’ music as we all walk about the room filling in some words or phrases on the
sheets, reading each others, maybe stopping to talk, commenting on what others have written, reminding ourselves of more things as we see the sheets of paper fill up. In the past I probably would have left it at that, perhaps having everything that was written read out while we all listened, or leaving the sheets out on display, for reference for a few days while the students had time to write their own ‘beach piece’, working through various stages of the writing processes. This has been a productive pleasant activity, nearly everyone has success with it. We all enjoy the poems or stories that are finished and shared or published. The pre-writing activity warms everyone up, gives everyone some starting language, everyone has something to say, a story to tell, an atmosphere to describe, or a memory to recount. A reasonable level of classroom success, why bother to critique it, what further results could I hope for or want?

I suppose it was after marking yet another set of such writing that I had a familiar experience for teachers - wearisomeness. How much longer would I keep using the idea, how many more beach pieces could I keep responding to with enthusiasm and individual attention? It wasn’t that I despised the adolescents in my classroom for year after year producing similar material. My process had elicited ‘honest’, ‘true’, ‘real’ writing, often expressed with flare and originality. And, importantly from the perspective of teaching writing, it was an activity that very often gave students a sense of success with their writing, providing motivation for their next writing task.

Thinking about the activity from the point of view of a feminist wanting to employ a critical pedagogy I started to see that the activity had more uses. For example, perhaps I could focus on the language aspect. Once we had all brainstormed our first thoughts onto the shared sheets, what say I ‘cruelly’ said, let’s tear all these sheets up and start again, and we are not allowed to use any of the images, ideas, phrases we have used this first time? Perhaps it would be better not to tear the sheets up. In fact the first time we did this, some students were upset, feeling their words had been de-valued, as not good enough. Probably it is better simply to set the first sheets aside. However the second round does produce different language, a new range of images, some different perspectives, different situations of being at the beach emerge. More specific memories seem to come through, a greater range of possible beach experiences is explored. For example, we often move into the aspect of how the language to do with beaches can be used metaphorically for other aspects of our lives.
Perhaps I can explore further, shifting on from the language element. I could pose some questions. Is there any difference in girls’ and boys’ experiences of the beach? For whom can access to the beach be more problematic? What happens if one group’s use of the beach interferes with another’s? Is living at the beach a privilege from which many New Zealanders are excluded and what implications does this have? How have we defined what constitutes the beauty of beaches? How can the beach take on different meanings and readings if we switch our way of viewing it? These are some questions to begin with, but the students need to think of other questions of beach experience which could be asked. This may lead on to different writing genres which in turn need to be taught and practised.

It is important to say that I am not meaning to replace the first activity with the further developments. Rather, I want to add them on. In this way the pleasure, motivation, comfortableness and security of the early activity is maintained, but the developments shift us on to deeper levels of analysis of how we experience the world, of how our experiences shape what we perceive as ‘normal’, our rights, and how our childhood memories are constructed by contextualised situations which it is all too easy to ignore completely.

I have deliberately worked through this extensive example in some detail. I wanted to demonstrate how much more there is to discover about our teaching when we keep thinking about it. Even our best ideas only work as long as we keep being dissatisfied with them. I also tried to pose myself the challenge of examining a part of my teaching that I might initially have felt was a really genuinely ‘politically free’ area. Surely our memories of times at the beach would be instinctive, innocent, free from oppressions? My experience of re-examining the activity, leads me to say, yes there is an innocent pleasure and comfort with the activity that needs preserving in its own context. I will continue to set up the gentle, safe environment for writing a beach piece. But instead of leaving it contained within its own ease and innocence, I will move it on, so that we are able to revisit it, and question it, reflect on how it demonstrates gaps or privileges in our located lives. As Gayatri Spivak (1990) says we cannot “freely play”. There is no way in which I can speak from or occupy an innocent place. Experience is never transparent, it is always in relation to other things. We cannot presume it to be untrammelled.
It is not the point of feminist critique to spoil our pleasures in the classroom. The happy or ‘passionately invested’ memories are still important and are part of constructing how we interact with life and with others. What the strategies of critique can offer us is the position of being able to give our experiences multiple or more knowing readings of our lives. We are able to work out actions for change when we have established some critical distance from familiar starting points. Once again Freirian pedagogy has a similar approach. Beginning with the familiar, but being able to reflect on it with a critical gaze, means that learners can move towards analyses of ‘big’ issues, of politics and economics, of class and gender, through their own experiences, rather than by being delivered the information, as if they were “cultural deficits dependent on the teacher as a delivery system for words, skills, and ideas, to teach them how to speak, think and act…” (Freire in McLaren and Leonard 1993, p 67).

These strategies of using critique in our feminist classrooms have all the features of the consciousness-raising groups of the women’s movement (Weiler 1991). They are embedded in valorising the personal, the particular, the special individual nature of each participant’s experience. In being shared and discussed, both their differences and their common elements provide the basis for being able to make strategic generalisations. Such generalisations can be converted into action plans which will lead to change. The private becomes public, the particular becomes general, then the personal can become political.
Chapter Eight

Feminist Education for a ‘Woman’s True Profession’

The discourse of the goddess as nurturing and maternal, the idea of “Goddesses in Every Woman” (Bolen), and Catharine Beecher’s construction of teaching as “woman’s true profession” come together in the discourse of the teaching profession as the continuation of mothering and the nurturance of the individual child. If this discourse is sometimes muted by the cacophony of political demands for accountability, computerization, and professionalization, it is not obliterated, but continues to flourish within the context of teachers’ lives and desires.

- Suzanne Damarin, Would You Rather be a Cyborg or a Goddess? On being a Teacher in a Postmodern Century.

Pre-service teacher education - a contested domain. To whom does it ‘belong’ to comment and take charge?

Teacher Education can be seen as a relatively benign way of controlling the profession. It also has the potential for changing what happens in schools. Consequently it is a significant area of contestation among the many groups concerned about the nature of teaching and learning. The key players seem to be teachers, members of the public particularly parents, politicians, students in schools, pre-service students and teacher educators themselves. Teacher education is one of the most heavily criticised areas of the teaching profession. The complaints about it range from it being too theoretical, from the teaching profession and the politicians; to it being too practical, from the teacher educators; to it being too liberal, from the politicians. To whom does teacher education ‘belong’? Who should be involved in devising its curriculum and its practice?
Foucault places teaching in a small cartel of professions which he argues have enormous power in assessing and diagnosing each individual according to a normalising set of assumptions; the "carceral network of power/knowledge" is what he calls it (in McNay 1994, p 95). This kind of power is enormously effective and acceptable because it is largely invisible. It forms the expectations of people; it is what they regard as 'standard' or basic essentials. It does not appear as overtly repressive. It is in fact "a network of ostensibly beneficent and scientific forms of knowledge" (ibid). The status of teaching as a profession contributes to the respectability and authority of what it does. "Ideologies of professionalism make the control mechanism appear reasonable and credible in the everyday patterns of teaching" (Popkewitz 1987, p7).

Teacher education is seen by most who are interested in controlling it as the route by which teachers will be enculturated into the profession. There is a regulated understanding of what the formal authority of the teacher is like and what her role should be, which is difficult to resist. The traditional view of pedagogy is that it is about the transmission of canonised knowledge in a universally recognised well-disciplined classroom. Teachers are charged, says Damaran (1995) "with the transformation of humans from childhood play and innocence through adolescent self-construction to burgeoning adulthood". People place great expectations on what education will be able to achieve for them, it is "their hope for a good tomorrow" (Popkewitz 1987). Most teacher education is designed to achieve this goal.

Robert Young (1992) makes a distinction between two of the more dominant kinds of classrooms, the 'methods' classroom and the 'discourse' classroom. He argues that overwhelming evidence points to the fact that most teachers are trained to operate a methods classroom. It is not without significance that many American universities call their teacher education courses 'methods' classes. The methods classroom is teacher and curriculum focussed, rather than learner and context focussed. It is certainly true that in the early stages of most teacher education programmes student teachers are encouraged to concentrate on their own presentation skills and basic management, as well as planning set lessons and becoming familiar with the curriculum requirements of their teaching subjects. In the case of the teacher
education programme in which I teach, these aspects take up the entire first teaching block, as well as being the major area for attention on the first teaching practice. One of the most common criticisms from associate teachers of the student teachers' first teaching practice is their unfamiliarity with the curriculum. It is in my view a very unhelpful criticism given the brevity of the first teaching block. But clearly a central expectation of the programme and also of most associate teachers is that beginning teachers should know how to present themselves as professionals in front of a class and 'teach' in accordance with the traditional view of what pedagogy is.

A noticeable aspect of this methods or formal approach to teacher education, with a straightforward cause and effect mode of operation, is that it assumes an unpolticised way of knowing. It focuses on a mechanical process of breaking down the tasks of teaching into component parts which the student teacher can then learn about and practise. Student teachers are encouraged to develop and 'master' a set of competencies in a hierarchical pattern, from basic to sophisticated levels. The aim of this approach to teacher education is to learn how to work efficiently within the system as it is, to fit in and carry on the traditions of teaching. Cochran-Smith in 'Learning to Teach Against the Grain' (1991) distinguishes between a teacher education which aims to work within the culture of teaching and one which attempts to work with the politics of schooling. The former is obviously the approach which will help the new teachers fit in, the latter is an approach which will encourage them to notice their environment and be aware of how it constitutes one particular construction of how education can be, rather than the way it has to be. Cochran-Smith argues that an ideal teacher education contains both elements. I will return later to reflect more on what would constitute a positive, purposeful, feminist and democratic approach to teacher education.

The enculturalisation into the profession seems to begin, by unspoken tradition, with an emphasis on the student teacher taking control of the classroom and knowing the content. There are other traditions associated with beginning teaching which have implications for the nature of teaching and the teacher's appropriate relationship with learners. In New Zealand, where the first term coincides with the beginning of the year,
one maxim given to new teachers is ‘wait until Easter before you smile at a class’; another is the ‘get your systems right first, then the relationships will take care of themselves’ approach. Most teachers begin their careers with an impoverished notion of the holistic nature of the teaching and learning environment and with little understanding of what a wealth of contexts need to be taken into account when planning and practising their craft.

The critical attitude of most associate teachers to their new colleagues in training is another factor which complicates the area of teacher education within New Zealand. The criticism is not usually directed at the student teachers themselves, though it can be. It is more often aimed obliquely at the teacher educators who are seen as having lost their understanding of what the ‘real world’ of the classroom is all about. And it is aimed at the teacher education institution itself which is always remembered in terms of the time in which the experienced teachers did their own training, rather than in terms of how it currently functions.

There is a major metamorphosis involved in becoming a teacher. During the process, the beginning teacher straddles both worlds, that of the student and that of the teacher. They are both highly contested worlds, ambiguous in the way in which power is operated and struggled for. It is highly unfortunate that the teacher education institutions are seen as outside the ‘real world’ of the school. Yet in another sense it is important that they do have a separateness because training to teach should not be an apprenticeship, and no single school or even community of several schools can provide the full environment needed for pre-service education. A complete teacher education is not simply a sum of all the parts of a number of different schools. It is different and distinct from the culture of schools, and needs to address the politics of schooling.

Educating teachers is not only about preparing them for teaching, it is preparation for ongoing development as a teacher. It needs to expose student teachers and experienced teachers, critically, to the limitations of our traditions and accepted procedures for working. Much has been documented about the extent to which pre-service teachers are already enculturated, indoctrinated, into what has been constituted as the way of being a teacher, even before they begin their training (Richert, in Valli ed
1992). This is reinforced both by the teachers they work with as associates, and by the students they encounter as they practise their teaching. Not infrequently are student teachers stopped in their practice lessons by students who object to their new and different ways of doing things in the classroom. In our system, the teacher educators visit the sites of teaching practice only occasionally, for the purposes of observation and feedback. There can be quite a considerable sense of stress during these visits which are infrequent because of funding limitations, causing the visits to double as both support and supervision. This means that the tutors are often not there at times when the student teacher feels most vulnerable from criticisms by associates and students. The result is that it can seem easier to go with the status quo of the school environment rather than to push for different ways of doing things. Many student teachers talk of never having an opportunity to be themselves in their teaching practice classrooms. They are restrained by the prevailing methodology of the teacher, the already established expectations of their classes, and the requirements of their College courses.

It is by no means a new thing that parents and politicians take an interest in and express views on what teacher education should be like. Since the turn of the century there has been the view that schools should be organised in a business-like way, with an expectation that teaching should emphasise the practical and immediately useful or productive skills. For example in the United States, one of the most enduring textbooks written for teachers in training, called Classroom Management by William C. Bagley was full of business terminology. It first appeared in 1907 and went through more than 30 printings over 3 decades (in Callahan 1962). It formed an accompaniment to the Taylorist approach to employment management which called for scientific methods and standardisation of systems that were seen to work well in industry. A re-emergence of these approaches can be seen in the U.K., Australia and more recently in New Zealand leading to the calls for teacher education to be more accountable, to be less theoretical and more practical, for example Turney and Wright (1990). Unfortunately there has not been enough discussion about the improbability of being able to apply the equivalent of time and motion studies to teaching and learning in classrooms. Classrooms are not as predictable as factories and business
plans. Teaching is complex intellectually, but also socially, psychologically and personally. It not easy to predict the outcomes of teaching actions. Even Bagley warned that “in a field so intricate and so highly complicated as (teaching),... we must give up any notion of solving all our problems in a day...”.

The concerns of teacher educators and the processes of teacher education are very complex, but not well enough understood even by those in the teaching profession, let alone the politicians and parent communities. In New Zealand no one has taken seriously enough the consideration of how to train the trainers. The people who become teacher educators are people who have been considered by their peers to be excellent classroom teachers. The majority come to teacher education from schools not universities, and they have little, in my case no training for adult education. Apart from being given very brief inductions to the actual programme being offered by the institution they are employed by, there is no formal training in how to teach teachers. Some people manage to find out for themselves, but a good deal of the teacher education delivered in New Zealand is a kind of passing on of the best of a highly regarded individual’s practice to the new people entering the profession.

In this chapter I want to look at some of the controversies which surround teacher education, and at how the application of feminist pedagogical principles and practice might make a contribution to improving the quality of teacher education. Most of my examples will relate to the New Zealand context of secondary teacher education, which consists of a one year programme following on from the completion of a subject based degree. The two largest institutions for training secondary teachers in New Zealand, at Auckland and Christchurch, have been entirely separate from University input. The smaller secondary teacher education courses are in Colleges which have merged with University Education faculties - Waikato, Massey and Victoria. The one year programmes for the larger College intakes generally consist of approximately 20 weeks College-based teaching, interspersed by three teaching practices of 4 weeks each. The smaller cohorts have closer contact with local schools and, particularly in the case of curriculum or teaching studies, cooperate with practising teachers to deliver their programmes.
We are perhaps only now coming to terms with the complexity of the problems associated with training teachers, and confronting these issues may be what leads us on from the despair expressed by Ellsworth (1989) about how to develop an emancipatory pedagogy in the face of the enormous variability and diversity of demands from the profession of teaching. Feminists have faced similarly complex issues in finding ways of working for change within an enormously varied ‘women’s community’. Perhaps there are ways to exchange some ideas about the problems and come up with even more strategies for improvement.

**What is achievable in pre-service education?**

When student teachers begin their course of pre-service work they have already constructed for themselves a discourse of what the schooling experience is like. What is less likely is that they will have reflected on that discourse, or that they will have a theoretical background from which to critique it. They will therefore have a lot of information and experience of the practice of teaching, but little of the theories of teaching and learning.

Their first concerns also focus around practical matters. In their early courses they look for relevance, which means finding out about what the syllabus requires them to do, what resources there are available, and what teaching strategies work best. At this early stage it seems that they are unquestioningly keen on the transmission model of teaching. They are hungry to soak up the good ideas of their tutors so that they can apply them in their own attempts on teaching practice. That this is the case means it must be considered seriously by teacher educators, because the modelling of sound teaching approaches is a key element in successful teaching. As in any teaching and learning situation the students must be made to feel secure and aware that their concerns are being addressed. We can not dismiss their demands for a box of tricks that will work in the classroom. Their needs to feel some confidence in their preparedness for teaching, to have success on teaching practice, so that they will be liked by pupils and associates, are very strong basic driving forces which can not be ignored. Their fears that classes will riot, that they will run out of things to teach, that they will have to assume some unnatural teacher-persona are similarly strong emotional factors in
beginning teacher education which must be dealt with. But in dealing with them we must also work to transform them.

This is where teacher education becomes an exceedingly complex form of teaching. We have to teach on two levels at once, keeping both of the levels open and available for observation and self-aware critique. On one level there are tutors and students with the tutors inducting the students in all that is required to become teachers, professionally, intellectually and socially. On the other level there must be a disruptive kind of teaching going on, one which tries to undermine the teaching act so that all the components of it are made transparent.

I have already mentioned the way in which learning to teach is an uncomfortable and ambiguous process in which to be engaged. When students begin the process they are still fully in the student camp, but by the end they are assumed to have become a teacher, so presumably along the way the shift is gradually taking place. Many of our students both in their journals, and in face-to-face tutorial sessions discuss the impact of this radical transformation on their personal and psychological development. At what point can they say for themselves I am now a teacher, and I no longer need what the teacher educator has to give?

I would argue, of course, that there is never a time when we can throw off the need for advice and mentoring in relation to our growth and development as teachers. However there is a personal and emotional time when it is important to make the statement; when for reasons of morale and self esteem a student teacher has to declaim that she or he is no longer a student, but a teacher. During the period of training students will make this statement at different stages. I certainly acknowledge its importance, but as I have said, I see it as a statement emerging from the affective side of student teachers, rather than from their intellectual or cognitive side. After all it is the most difficult thing to signify - that moment when one has ‘become’ a teacher. It is one of the most hotly contested debates within teacher education. At what stage can a teacher education institution state for sure that a graduate will be able to manage as a successful teacher in a school? The circumstances surrounding the time of pre-service work, even those highly regarded teaching practice times in the ‘real world’ of schools, are so far removed from what it will
be like as an appointed full staff member in a particular school that the accuracy of predictive graduation statements can be very unreliable.

According to Cochran-Smith (1991) and Hatton (1994) student teachers, and many of their associates and teacher educators, believe that confidence, basic teacher skills such as voice, presentation and planning, good teaching ideas, relevant curriculum materials, and getting into the classroom to try things out are the key elements for a successful pre-service programme. My view is that these needs are more characteristic of the requirements of an apprenticeship than they are of entry to what should be the highly intellectual task of teaching and learning. They therefore limit what can be achieved in pre-service teacher education programmes.

Pre-service student teachers do not usually recognise the political and epistemological issues which surround schooling. Their perception of the vulnerability of a teacher’s position as a lonely individual confronting an often unsympathetic group of learners places their focus on managing the practical situation and emerging from it feeling that they have remained in control. Many teacher education programmes have prioritised this need too, and added the requirement of preparing the student teachers to deliver the curriculum that is required by local, state or national government agencies.

We need to redress this imbalance in pre-service teacher education of a focus on affective and pragmatic requirements as opposed to cognitive, philosophical and political requirements. Unless we do, we will limit what can be achieved in pre-service teacher education. Until teacher education focuses on developing an understanding of what it means to be taught, and therefore on what it means to teach, in a full context of an intellectual and political understanding of schooling, rather than on what to do and how to do it in particular classrooms, we will have no way of urging either student teachers or their more experienced colleagues to look beyond strategies to protect themselves from failure, ridicule and criticism. Teacher education in New Zealand must become more intellectual and less pragmatic.
Recent developments in teaching writing and reading have focussed on giving teachers a deeper understanding of how they themselves go about these activities (Carruthers et al, 1991). Writing or reading projects, which I have used for teacher education, both pre- and in-service, invite teachers to look at their own skills and behaviours as readers and writers, to identify their own strengths and anxieties, to consider attitudinal aspects of their success or otherwise in reading and writing (for example, Blau and Bencich in Milner and Pope eds, 1994). From a position of more personal knowledge about their own behaviours the teachers are introduced to different kinds of research into writing and teaching writing (or reading). They then begin considering how to develop strategies for classroom use that will take into account different models of learning, different ways of being a writer or a reader, and different strategies which will actually teach aspects of writing. They also involve themselves along with their students in the writing activities of the classroom, keeping close touch with what being a learner means. Reflection, revision and continued critique of the process and familiarity with the research constantly emerging about the teaching of writing and reading is a key part of each project.

This model has many similar elements to feminist and postmodern suggestions about working in classrooms, particularly in beginning with experience as a source of knowledge. There is a genealogical element where the learner traces her own history (as a writer, or a reader, or as a student teacher), then through some analysis of it comes to a greater recognition of its specific nature, and of its impact on her current position in relation to understanding and achieving. The introduction of theoretical, research and/or philosophical content into this situation places both the theory and the experience in active juxtaposition where they can be reviewed and critiqued. The important thing that this enables us to do is to reduce the tension between the theory and the practice, so that in the reconciliation they can serve each other rather than compete for priority.

Although the emotional needs and practical demands of student teachers will always be significant, they will continue to limit what can be achieved in pre-service education unless more intellectual and deconstructive strategies can also be employed. Teacher educators and
student teachers need to work on changing their perceptions of what is required for learning to teach. A key factor in this will be that student teachers will become less satisfied with adopting uncritiqued models of practice, and more interested in asking questions about what the possibilities of teaching and learning could be. As well as improving the pedagogical education of teachers, these skills should also make possible, even at the pre-service stage, alternative consideration of the social, cultural, and gender equity issues, because “(c)onsciousness of oppression can not be the object of instruction, it must be discovered in experience” (Heaney 1984).

**Does the image of teaching as a woman’s profession affect the nature and expectations of pre-service education?**

Most teaching is done by women. In New Zealand in 1994 87% percent of primary school teachers were women, and 59% of secondary teachers were women. In early childhood education the percentage is higher even than for primary. The Ministry of Education report on education trends shows that between 1992 and 1995, the percentages of men in the profession, early childhood, primary and secondary sectors is dropping (“Education Trends Report”, 1995, Ministry of Education, Wellington).

Michael Apple (1986) reminds us that the history of teaching is the history of a gendered workforce. The feminisation of the teaching profession has a number of issues associated with it, some of which are positive for the profession and for women, some of which are not.

The negative aspects associated with the feminisation of any area of employment include the payment of lower salaries, for example in the UK between 1855 and 1935 women were paid two thirds of the salary paid to men in teaching (ibid, chapter 3), and it was only in the 1960s that women teachers began to be paid the same salary as men in New Zealand. A less tangible factor about a profession dominated by women is that the status accorded to it is lower than those in which men dominate, because women carry over into their professional lives the lower status they have been granted within patriarchy. This is borne out within the teaching profession itself because both mana and salary
increase in the areas where men outnumber women, as they do still in tertiary teaching.

Michael Apple argues that since the profession is dominated by women, and therefore accorded lower status, it is maybe easier to control and restructure the work of teachers so that they have even less professional autonomy, and more centralised monitoring. In Teachers and Texts (1986) he extends this argument suggesting that since governments are trying to give teachers less professional input to schooling but more administrative duties in the form of monitoring, assessing and record-keeping, it may seem to some that these managerial tasks are more ‘serious’, more professional, and of higher status than the more intangible aspects of teaching such as developing classroom relationships. He argues that women teachers may feel that they have made major gains in terms of gaining access to more managerial tasks, and therefore be flattered into accepting the changes without really considering what they mean. I doubt this however since in my view the administrative busy-ness now being put on to teachers is not a part of the job from which women gain much satisfaction. Although Apple’s intention in this argument is to be sympathetic to the situations women teachers find themselves in, he seems to me to fall into the worst kind of stereotyped notions about women’s natures. Even his ‘however argument’, that not all women may feel this because most of them have come into teaching because of their inclination towards a nurturing, caring professional role which means that they will resist efforts by governments to regiment teaching and take away the essential elements of lively classroom interactions, smacks of patronising, essentialist assumptions about the nature of women teachers.

Regardless of how Apple fails to argue his case in a way which convinces me as a feminist, what he is raising, very clearly, is that the profession of teaching is influenced by the fact that it is primarily a ‘woman’s true profession’. The question is then to what extent does this ‘soft’ image of the profession affect the attitudes to teacher training. Has it influenced the extent to which it has become a heavy intellectual or academic training as opposed to a practically based course? Grumet (1988) puts the case that the men who ran education and looked to women to do most of the teaching did so, not just because women were cheaper to employ, but
because they thought women were ‘naturally’ inclined to the ministering of children, that they had the instinctive knowledge about how to teach children, and therefore would not need so much training. Most early teacher education was on the job, apprentice-type training. It was training for a practical craft, not an intellectual profession. Still today, teachers’ colleges are seen as softer intellectual institutions by comparison with the universities. A conscientious girl who works well without achieving top academic marks will be recommended for teachers’ college rather than university.

In New Zealand while most pre-service student teachers are encouraged to complete degrees, the teaching diploma itself is an undergraduate qualification. It does not have intellectual status. Teachers in universities are not required to have a teaching qualification. Their higher academic, subject-specific qualifications are regarded as all that is necessary to teach. The teaching side of their job is obviously not regarded as sufficiently complex or demanding to need any training.

In being a gendered profession and associated with the lower status sex, the expectations are that teacher education should be less demanding, and more focussed on practical matters than on intellectually rigorous activities.

The fact that the emphasis in teacher education is not only on intellectual matters is however something which the profession could use to its advantage. Grumet’s argument is that women bring more affection and emotional expressiveness to their work, more natural instinctiveness, and that these qualities are essentials for good teaching. But they are only helpful as long as they are reflected on and critiqued. It is important to build trust in a classroom, and comfortableness to express feelings or respond to our senses, only to the extent that we have an understanding of how and when to use them. Just ‘being supportive’, or considerate of people’s feelings may not make us any more aware of difference, or knowing about contexts, or wisely critical of our learning.

Feminist pedagogies have the potential to resolve the conflicts that have traditionally been seen to exist between emotional responsiveness and intellectual rigour, between women’s ‘traditional’ nurturing skills and
their skills as professional leaders within teaching. An effective teacher education programme must be challenging intellectually, as well as draw out our affective and sensory skills of response and discernment within the classroom environment. We need instinct, reflection and critical skills if we are to act as 'transformative intellectuals' in our classrooms (Lester and Onore 1990).

**How can feminist pedagogy transform teacher education?**

The first thing that a feminist approach to teacher education would do is highlight the contextualised nature of teaching, any teaching, not only feminist teaching. By naming itself, feminist pedagogy acknowledges its partial perspective and indicates that it considers all statements made about schooling matters are similarly particularly, and partially located within different discourses.

Feminist pedagogy will not be satisfied with simply being an aspect of the teacher education programme, taking the form of a unit on equity for example. It would require the whole programme to ‘own up’ to the discourses it uses and represents. Then each stage of the process of learning to teach needs to be framed in relation to how the different views or contexts would be influential. For example, when the aspect of classroom management is being dealt with, or when aspects of presentation skills are being discussed and practised, alternative approaches need to be represented with each indicating in favour of whom they operate. We would then be asserting the constructed nature of teaching and learning.

In itself this approach would set a clear cognitive and critical basis for the programme, two elements which need to be featured in a feminist pedagogy. In other words a feminist-based teacher education would consciously be teaching its students to be active thinkers about their future profession. No traditional or accepted practice would be able to simply assume a place in the skills, competencies, strategies or thinking of a student teacher. Students would be taught how to deconstruct and critique the years of teaching and learning with which they already were familiar. Encounters with theories of teaching and learning, with curriculum development, the psychology of learners or the planning and management of schools would be approached in similar fashion. A key
motive of feminist teacher education would lead to strategies which will enable student teachers to become critical thinkers about how their profession and their roles within it have been constructed.

Another key element in the transformation of teacher education by bringing a feminist aspect to it would be confronting the effect of the gendered nature of the profession on the quality of teaching and learning, and on the social and emotional construction of boys and girls. From a patriarchal perspective the fact of teaching consisting of a gendered workforce brings negative connotations as I have mentioned earlier. But looked at through feminist eyes, it could be seen quite differently. With feminist teacher training, a predominantly women’s profession could offer the balanced combination of responsive, creative, intellectually challenging, and politically aware learning and teaching environments needed for both genders.

Women have been allowed greater freedom to express their emotional and nurturing qualities. A feminist teacher education programme which valued these attributes and turned them into strengths within the classroom would use them as key tools to engage learners with new material, and experiences, and to develop practical and thinking skills in ‘authentic’ contexts. (I am using authentic here not in the sense of being real, but in the sense of experiential learning strategies.)

The experiences of women in relation to power and authority have another quality which benefits teaching and learning. Since we have not been accepted as authoritative or powerful, we bring an understanding of the limits of any individual’s power in the position of teacher. Perhaps traditional male views of authority have assumed too much about what it is possible for an ‘authority’ to achieve in the classroom. The teacher needs to be capable, to have ‘knowing experiences’ in relation to teaching and learning, but she also must be able to allow learners the opportunity to develop their own potential, independent of the teacher. Women used to Freudian notions (for example, see Millett 1969, pp 253 - 268) that they must long term be rejected by their sons and their daughters, possibly clinging less to their classroom power and more readily accept that their students will move on beyond them.
Recent publications, particularly in English education demonstrate that
gender issues in relation to boys' learning is a topic on many school
development programmes. Journals such as College English and English in
Australia have included several articles in the last eighteen months
reflecting on problems with boys' self images, their writing and reading
skills. By contrast statistics, such as School Certificate results, are
revealing that girls are indeed 'doing everything', except possibly
engineering, and usually within the school institutional environment
they are doing better than boys in achievement levels. It appears that
boys will need creative feminist teaching to help them reconcile their
affective, expressive, responsive, intellectual and physical skills to bring
them into a much more holistic connection with the teaching and
learning processes. The perpetuation of myths that boys need the most
attention in classrooms, that they must always be given the physical
activities to do, is in fact depriving them of learning skills, and thinking
time, and the abilities needed for critical and reflective intellectual
development.

At the heart of feminists' work in education is the aim to avoid stating
things in terms of binary oppositions, which although helpful at times as
a strategy to define possible extremities, artificially constructs differences
as though they are irreconcilable, as though they are incompatible. The
construction of boys and girls as though they are opposites, albeit equal
and complementary, has pushed both genders into extreme behaviours,
both sets of which are unhelpful for better learning. The emphasis on the
passivity of girls and the activity of boys has inhibited both sexes in their
capacities to learn and develop in holistic and many-faceted ways.
Feminist pedagogy tries to coalesce the extremes of binaries, to encourage
both teachers and learners to acknowledge the full range of their skills
and potentials, to draw on what have been constructed as male attributes
as well as those which have been named as female qualities. In other
words the equity aims of a feminist pedagogy imply that each learner has
the right to include, in fact to amalgamate, female and male attributes in
their learning opportunities.

Instead of focussing on the gendered nature of learners as if these were
fixed in concrete, if we looked for the opportunity to reconstruct the
fragmentary, inessential, creative, de-centred and re-actionary nature of
the different selves we encountered in classrooms we might see the potential of learners, learning and teaching to transform. Even within the constraints imposed by the culture of schools.

Feminisms have always been reluctant to separate the theoretical from the practical. When it has appeared that some feminists have lost a sense of the social and practical purpose of their work others have reminded them that a key part of feminist emancipation is to make changes in the lives of women in particular, but also for the general 'public good'. A feminist teacher education would construct practice in relation to theory, and develop theory in order to inform classroom practice. Feminist pedagogy must disrupt accepted classroom practice, it must result in changes within classrooms or it could not claim the name. Within a feminist framework student teachers and associate teachers would be forced to recognise that the particular practices they use are choices, deliberate selections from a range of possibilities. There could be no claim to 'the reality' of the classroom, only the observation that there are a number of different ways of doing things.

Another way in which feminist pedagogy can be used to transform teacher education is in the different perspective it takes on what has been created as a divide between the personal and public personas of a teacher. Feminists would want to assimilate the person of the teacher more closely with the public role. The fear of losing the self in the public role is one of the most commonly expressed anxieties of pre-service student teachers. Teachers may have a wider experience than their students, they may have deeper knowledge in some specialised areas. They must be capable as teachers and professionals of guiding students through learning experiences towards specific goals required by curriculum and assessment designs. But they must also recognise that they are not just pawns on the educational chessboard, playing one role. They are subject players in the game (McWilliam 1994), and there is more than one strategy available. We must bring our whole located persons to the classroom, especially the difficult-to-manage classrooms which will require even more variety of responses, strategies and interactions from the teacher. The less conscious teacher education makes teachers of using the whole of their personal resources to manage and be capable in the classroom, the more it will restrict teachers' chances of success. When
feminists refuse to lose their person behind a public persona they are trying to keep the sanity of their senses. We need to hold on to the memory that women were drafted into the teaching profession because of their responsive and nurturing abilities (Popkewitz 1987), and not give in to pressures to become bureaucratic functionaries. These pressures are however difficult to withstand since they are reinforced by many different sources, as Foucault describes:

The activity which ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, order, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation, marks of the ‘value’ of each person and the levels of knowledge) and by means of a whole series of power processes (enclosure, surveillance, reward and punishment, the pyramidal hierarchy). (Foucault in Beacon and Parker 1995, p 114)

Such pressures work to make us doubt the value of any individual step we might take to vary from the mainstream. In fact they stop us even trying to think of different ways of being within the structures of schools. Unless the whole accepted basis of teacher education is challenged by a feminist approach, all those involved begin to assume too much about what constitutes successful teaching. “The rituals ... make the myths appear universal and ahistorical, dramatising ideas and cultural cohesion while, at the same time, normalising in equal social relations.” (Popkewitz 1987, p 127.) While Popkewitz is not a feminist his point is apposite.

**A feminist project to distract the student teacher from the folk-lore and ‘wisdom’ of experienced teachers**

The potency of the rituals of schooling is what it makes it difficult to distract student teachers from the socialisation and professionalisation processes which they move through in teacher education. Popkewitz (1987) identifies three of what he calls ‘commonplaces’ in the discourse of teacher education which work to embed these rituals in the minds of pre-service students. They are the tension between Colleges or Faculties of Education and schools, an emphasis on the psychological aspects of teaching methods and management styles, and the belief that the best way to learn about teaching is by doing it.
Even in New Zealand, where nearly all staff in the Colleges of Education are appointed directly from schools, there is a tension between staff in the Colleges and staff in schools. The most direct contact which the two groups have is through the placing of student teachers on teaching practice. Perhaps it is that teachers see the fragile efforts of many of the new recruits to teaching, and doubt that the teacher educators are doing an adequate job of teacher preparation. Perhaps there is an underlying belief that teaching is such a personal job, that ‘you need the right personality for it’, which obscures the amount of training that both needs to and does go on. Perhaps it is part of the mythology of teaching to undermine the training we all received. Hatton’s research (1994) into attitudes towards teacher educators would certainly indicate this. Whatever the cause, this mistrust does a lot of harm to the experience of the pre-service student on teaching practice, setting up an us-against-them tension. So often pre-service students report the words of their associates: ‘forget all the theory they give you at College, this is what you really need to do’.

A project to distract the student teacher from the folklore of experienced teachers would need to begin with developing a closer relationship between College staff and associate teachers. There are a number of ways to attempt this. One is for teachers to be engaged in their own professional development working with College staff on higher qualifications which have been designed to relate theoretical work specifically to classroom practice, school management, curriculum development, or changes within education. When teachers are applying theory in their own situations, or developing their own research projects they value the support and facilitation by lecturers who have skills and experience in such work. The relationship can then develop into a more collegial one, and teachers become appreciative of the attempts of pre-service students to apply new ideas or methods, if they are attempting similar strategies and projects of their own.

Another strategy to improve the relationship between College and school is for teachers to be trained for associate work, for a closer relationship to be developed with the College so that teachers understand and own more of the programme which the student teachers are undertaking. I think it has been a failure of some Colleges not to take their programmes to their
colleagues in schools for review and development. This needs planning for in the workloads of teachers and teacher educators if it is to work properly. It does not help the relationship if such work becomes added on to already over-extended work loads, on both sides. Several successful projects exist in the United States involving school and university based teacher education programmes working in close associations. For example the case study approach exemplified in work by Greta Morine-Bershimer (1996).

Cochran-Smith (1991) discusses a project of ‘mentoring’ teacher educators, associate teachers and pre-service students as a way of breaking down barriers. Her argument is that if student teachers, either as a result of their own thinking and locations, or as a result of their teacher educators’ projects, approach their associates with radical ideas for different types of teaching they are very likely to receive knock backs because of the anxiety, jealousy, or professional exhaustion of their associates. However, if the ideas have been discussed before, and the associate is part of the mentoring of the younger teacher into the profession, the chances of acceptance and classroom success with the new ideas are much greater. My experiences of working with student teachers who want to try out more radical classroom strategies, either from a feminist perspective or within English teaching, bear this out too. Where I have approached the associate teacher to support the student’s idea of working with radical strategies, and the associate has undertaken to support the project, the student teacher has had major success which has stayed with them into their efforts as first and second year teachers. It is noticeable that new teachers who are trying out more radical practices are likely to be more supportive of the pre-service student trying out similar approaches. Without such a project of mentoring and support it is highly unlikely that a student teacher will have success with alternative teaching strategies, and therefore even less likely that they will continue them into their own first appointments as teachers.

An emphasis on the psychological components of teaching methods and management styles, identified by Popkewitz (1991) and McWilliam (1994) among others, as one which depoliticises many classroom actions, also mitigates against the likelihood of innovative practice taking place in classrooms. Practices which emphasise the psychological aspects of
learning and teaching above others, place the focus on the individuality of the learner, and are based on a belief in the power of the teacher to establish classroom environments which can compensate for the previous experiences of the learners. While it is important to attend to the differences in learners, to care for their particular needs, and to work to establish a constructive, supportive classroom environment, teachers must see how the classroom, all classrooms in fact are located within complex power relations of gender, class and culture which cannot be ignored. It takes more than running a sensitive, student focussed classroom to make a real difference to the complexly located lives of learners. We have to do more than be efficient and accountable professionals if we want to do more than take the cultural capital of the middle class and apply it to schooling as if it was natural, as if each student has access to it, and is comfortable in it (Popkewitz ed 1987). Giroux and McLaren emphasise that student teachers who are also generally from the middle class are left to assume that their own experiences constitutes a standard cultural and political referent (in Popkewitz ed 1987).

The belief that the best way to learn about teaching is by doing it, reflects a commitment to the idea that what happens in classrooms is what pedagogy is all about. The trouble with this is that what happens in classrooms is often very routine practice, based around what a teacher has discovered will ‘work’. Teachers who learn during their pre-service training that the most important aspect is what happens in the ‘real’ classroom become addicted to acquiring practical ideas. They forget that theory is also practical when it is applied. When a teacher reads some theoretical material, discusses it and thinks about it before applying it in a specific circumstance, she will find that it provides her with a wider range of options to draw on. She will also have run it through beforehand in her head, checked it out in advance, before attempting to apply the idea. The chances are that she will also analyse its success afterwards, since her pre-thinking about it will give her a commitment to it, a sense of ownership, which will invite further reflection and refinement.

Applying feminist pedagogy means that theoretical work has been done in advance by the practitioner. In order to use feminist approaches in the classroom the teacher must have participated in a critique of the
dominant educational approaches and deliberately chosen another way of working. The feminist teacher is an intellectual teacher, one who has considered the theoretical and political implications of what happens in classrooms, and can knowingly make choices about what to do in the classroom given the particular contexts that she confronts.

I would like to see teacher education engage in a feminist project to bring about a major transformation to what happens in classrooms. In revaluing the contribution of women within the profession, the feminist project would boost the esteem, confidence and expectations of well over half the members of the profession. Women teachers as feminists would claim and not devalue the strengths which as women they have traditionally developed. They would insist on coalescing the affective and cognitive skills involved in the learning process. They would promote and give prestige to the learning skills which are giving girls such a head start academically over boys.

From the start of teacher education courses we need to engage in analysis of what happens in classrooms, to demonstrate that what happens is not ‘real’, but a particular selection of what could happen. What happens in classrooms has been chosen in a complex way by both teachers and students, parents and educational administrators, and reflects particular beliefs and expectations about the functioning and purposes of education. Unfortunately most traditional teacher education has not recognised this and allowed the potency of classroom rituals to undermine the intellectual development of pre-service teachers.

The project that I want to follow up after completing this text is that of working with pre-service teachers who are developing their pedagogy from a feminist perspective. I will also be working with experienced teachers who are engaged in post-graduate feminist education studies. The aim of the project will be to link the two groups through occasional meetings as part of their courses, and to arrange as part of the teaching practice experience of the pre-service teachers, that they will work with at least one of the experienced feminist teachers. In this situation, and with my support in their classroom work, the pre-service teachers will attempt to implement a selection of the feminist pedagogical strategies which they have developed.
This proposal attempts to address some of the difficulties which seem to be inherent in most teacher education programmes particularly in New Zealand at present, namely: the lack of theoretical and political awareness (Hatton 1994); the tensions which develop between teachers and teacher educators (Renwick 1993, Hatton 1994); the lack of understanding by associate teachers of the expectations for teaching practice (ibid); the lack of support for pre-service teachers trying out 'new ideas and theories' (McWilliam 1994 p45); the dominant authority of the school-based customs and rituals (ibid p73).

Perhaps such a project might help teacher education become a transformative agent for the teaching profession, and empower pre-service teachers who:

... want to be able to shape children's lives giving them hope for the future and instilling a sense of confidence in each one. Teachers may be the hope for changing our society for the better. (a pre-service teacher, quoted in Damarin, 1995, p 55.)
Chapter Nine

Firing the Canon in the English Classroom:

English generally has neglected all modern thinking associated with linguistics, sociolinguistics, theories of discourse, semiotics and its deconstructive offshoots...English cannot plausibly remain simply what it has been. New dimensions must come into play, new bearings must be found. Gender, race and class as issues express a powerful critique of English, but also provide a basis for considerable extension of its scope. ... Opening up necessarily involves the redirection of attention to much more general and significant cultural phenomena than English has been prepared to address. If this means that the subject of English is no longer recognizable to itself, then so be it.

- Nick Peim Critical Theory and the English Teacher

I begin this chapter aware that my own thinking and approach to teaching English is being profoundly challenged by ideas that feminisms and postmodern theory are raising. Many of these notions provide a natural theoretical basis for much of my classroom practice, and they feel very comfortable. I find for example that deconstruction strategies applied to reading texts, and the questioning of our traditional views of the authority of knowledge in relation to a literary canon, and to notions of 'standard' English, supportive of ways in which I have been working.

But some of the ideas have been more difficult to grapple with, and often directly conflict with elements of my theory and practice as a feminist. I will begin by taking the idea of difference and how we have often used it within English teaching. I try to demonstrate how my thinking about difference has broadened and changed as a result of the postmodern influence. Later on I explain some of the ways in which I think feminist pedagogy needs to underpin all our work in English education. I conclude with some of the
more difficult challenges that postmodernism has put to me, some of which I am trying to take up, some of which for the moment at least are still too hard.

It is obvious in our new understandings about the teaching of English that the concept of difference has become a key one. The proliferation of the word in conference themes and new book titles testifies to this. But what is it we mean by difference? Are we all using the term to the same purpose? Kathleen Weiler has a useful starting point:

An acknowledgement of the realities of conflict and tensions based on contradictory political goals, as well as of the meaning of historically experienced oppression for both teachers and students, leads to a pedagogy that respects difference not just as significant for students, but for teachers as well. (Weiler 1991, p462.)

How can we best make use of this as a theme in the teaching of English that is also underpinned by feminism, and by elements of postmodern thinking?

The deception of difference: can we avoid it?
Difference is sometimes used in misleading ways in English teaching. Misleading, that is, not in the sense of deliberate subterfuge, but out of some naiveté perhaps. It is often, certainly once by me, used to emphasise individuality: an exclusive distinctness, uniqueness in fact, conveying the idea that there is ‘nobody else like me’ (see Britzman in Biklen and Pollard, 1993, pp25 - 6). The naiveté entailed here springs out of the liberal humanist cult of the individual, from the belief that as a different, unique person I somehow have a true essence that it will be my life’s work to discover and reveal. Neo-liberals and neo-conservatives have transformed this idea into an ideology of individual right, and of the responsibility to take care of oneself rather than be dependent on a Welfare State. In terms of English teaching it generally implies the possibility of discovering a unique, mine-only, original voice; a way of speaking, a style of writing, a set of interpretations and responses to texts of various kinds that will be honest and true. Another possibility it suggests is that we can discover the particular and correct interpretation of the authentic voice of the writer of a text, what he or she really meant.
Of course there is much that is useful and seductive in this idea, especially as the basis for productive teaching strategies in the English classroom. When the idea is introduced to language learners, both students and teachers, they feel encouraged to experiment with language; each becomes inspired to find her or his ‘own voice’, value her own interpretations and responses, have confidence to question the voice or response of another language learner, even if that person is the teacher, or has the reputation of being an expert critic, or professional writer. With such confidence a learner can feel success in having achieved ‘her’ understanding of a poem, or maybe a Shakespearian play.

As a point of discovery in the process of learning language, the concept of difference, of personal validity and individuality is extremely important. It is a point from which we can gain a deal of confidence and pleasure, especially when we are new to a particular phase in our language development. As a strategy to begin, as a way of taking some personal responsibility for a piece of work, or a point of view, it is useful. It helps us all to claim, even if only for an instant: this is me; this is what I think or know; this is my idea and it is (for the moment) distinguishable from yours, and I am different from you.

Now, just because we discover some limitations in an idea that we once held as significant, we do not have to dispense with it altogether. We may be able to use it in more limited ways, or only in circumstances about which we are very explicit. But what can be problematic is if the language learner (teacher or student) remains fixed in that pose of a specific identity, convinced that in discovering their difference that they have ‘found themselves’. There is an attractiveness in feeling ‘I have the right answer’, a sort of Descartian sense of certain knowledge; cogitio ergo sum (I think, therefore, I am). The difficulty with such a state of mind is its dependency on the idea of a centred, stable self that is discoverable once and for all, which is somehow a given rather than constructed; and which is in the subject position from which all others (unless they are a-like) can be marginalised. This becomes then more than a naive idea; it has the potential for considerable misuse.

For example, a possible development might be: ‘I have found the meaning of this text, and others who agree with me are in one category, different
from those of who do not understand it, or see it our way'. An approach like this can lead people and their allies to a commitment to their own way of thinking, to a belief in the 'better-ness' of their position, to a sense of elitism, a superiority. Such beliefs have all the potential for developing into a single-minded, autocratic way of thinking which lays the foundations for fascist politics, for some of the worst propaganda elements from which many countries are suffering at the moment: discrimination and division on the grounds of ethnicity. It is frightening how quickly a sense of collective rightness can lead people to ignore lived customs and practices of centuries in order to pursue a fanatic, newly discovered belief in their own rightness, and the rightness of others like them.

In the English classroom we need therefore to be clear about the point at which we establish the importance of individual difference, use of 'authentic' voice, and personal response strategies, and the point at which we move beyond an approach that has some potential for becoming fundamentalist. What we need, in order to avoid the latter, is to introduce other strategies that help the language learner critique the basis of that difference, with its seductive belief in uniqueness.

Let's take another possible, more common and perhaps still more acceptable, use of the concept of difference, of which many English teachers make use: difference on the basis of race, or gender, or class, or sexuality.

Again this has much to recommend it. It indicates an important step has been taken beyond the liberal humanist assumption that everyone is born equal and deserves the same, fair treatment. This liberal idea actually conceals another message, that all 'normal' people are fundamentally the same - that is, white, male, middle class, and heterosexual. It also ignores the privileges that some children have in entering schooling systems that have been designed for them, by those who are in power, who are actually adult versions of them, and nearly all white and middle class. This idea is more fully developed by Stanley 1992, pp 96 - 100.

The exhortation to teachers to be conscious of difference in race, class and gender has brought about some useful innovations in English programmes. New book titles have been introduced including a much wider range of authors; for example Afro-american, women, Maori, Canadian and
Australian writers. There has been more equal recognition given to the different language strands: oral as well as written, listening, presenting and viewing as well as reading; more choice of writing genres; different forms of assessment; and attention paid to different learning styles (Pollard, in Biklen and Pollard 1993).

This approach to difference is open to criticism if its limitations are not noticed. One of these, which need not change what we are doing, but which may cause us to rethink our public relations, is the resistance it can draw from many neo-conservatives (and old conservatives, too!). This group, currently holding power in the hierarchy of privilege, claims neglect of their difference. They claim that the pendulum has swung too far against them, that there is too much feminism, or in New Zealand for example, that there is too much emphasis on Maori issues. They are anxious about the fate of the ‘great works’, and claim that literacy standards are slipping (Hirsch 1988, Bloom 1987), when in fact more people stay at school longer and are able to read and write than ever before in history. This persistent campaign, which claims undue media attention, (most recently in The Press, Christchurch, 20th November, 1996, p11) must not stop us using valuable materials or strategies, but it does mean that we need to be open, accessible, willing to discuss and demonstrate what we are doing to those who are not part of the profession.

More important is the possibility that too straightforward an approach to recognising difference in the classroom may backfire on us and prove to be the opposite of what we intended. It may turn out to be racist, sexist, exclusive and predictive. For example, because a class is all boys we will choose adventure literature, providing them with an unbalanced and limited diet of reading; or, with a rowdy class we restrict the range of activities, not encouraging them to develop a full range of communication skills keeping instead to written work or textbook exercises because such activities seem to keep them busy and quieter; or, even more harmful, we expect certain behaviours and achievement levels from a particular type of class.

Straightforward categorisation of difference may lead us to ignore the overlap among many kinds of difference. It is not adequate to assume one kind of difference, which may or may not be visible, is sufficient to explain
variety in attitudes or behaviour, or to be the rationale for the development of the English curriculum. On the other hand, I do acknowledge that any and all of these factors of difference will be important, at least to some extent, and should be taken into account in our teaching and learning of English. It is an enormous responsibility facing the English teacher who often seems to be the person most willing to take it on. English classrooms, with their use of a variety of texts, their emphasis on personal growth through language in addition to skill acquisition, open up the opportunities for teachers and students to engage in discussion and exchanges of personal experience. Narrative (oral and written), which is at the heart of many English teachers' programmes, opens up the opportunity to express and begin to appreciate the various differences within the classroom community.

Difference, as it could be taken into account in English teaching, is far more complex and transitory than any of these interpretations taken on their own. It is a concept which is arrived at through the perpetually shifting construction of each of us as subjects within specific, located and historical contexts. Moira Gatens (in Barret and Phillips eds, 1992, p133) describes it as "the manner in which culture marks bodies and creates specific conditions in which they live and recreate themselves".

It is this idea that I find exciting as an English teacher, that any moment of discovery about oneself, or a sense of knowing or being, is constantly repeatable. Neither as teachers nor as learners are we stuck for ever with a particular sort of difference, though at times one may dominate more than others. Rather we can lay claim to and expect to have many differences. Although this may elicit anxiety because of the prospect of fragmentation, of momentary-only knowledge either of self or ideas or things, there is the constant prospect of reconstitution, of revolving interrogation, (or reflexivity) which I will return to later.

The individual student or teacher is not a universalised individual (that is, white, male and middle class) but is a specific person of constantly emerging self awareness. She (or he) can use occasions, experiences, readings of texts and situations to add to her repertoire of differences. And teachers (who are also learning) can help provide strategies for students within the English class to begin sketching outlines or drawings of
themselves towards understanding that they are specific, located subjects made up of infinite combinations of connected sets. Similarly this broader, more complex, less static understanding of difference enables us to redraw our visions of what English is becoming. At the moment, world-wide, conservative governments are propagating standardised, nationalised curriculum and assessment procedures, pursuing a mythical concept of ‘international’ standard English. They often refer to it as ‘global English’, with an extraordinarily monocultural and colonising perception of how they think things ought to be. But it is not an international, multinational conglomerate English that we need. Forcing a single standardised English will destroy the creativity and many varieties of English that currently flourish within different communities. Language constructs community. If language diversity is stamped out, so will be the diversity of cultures.

To prevent this, and informed by feminism and postmodernism, we need a vision of English as a developing, unstoppably various language which is available to its users to help them construct a series of understandings of themselves, and their situations in response to continued evolutionary paths. Neo-conservative politicians and academics, if they seek to contain the language within a standard form, will constrain it, and be able to control how we think, comprehend, and communicate in a world over which they are taking increasing amounts of power.

I think we need a ‘gestalt’ approach to language teaching - in other words one that constantly allows for the shape to be larger and more than simply the sum of its component parts. We need an approach to language that is always capable of surprising us by how we can shape it, by how it can shape and recycle meanings, rather than one which restricts us to the past moment, which can not be renewed or re-deconstructed, so that no attention can be given to what might have been previously overlooked or left out. This means that teaching English would move far away from spelling lists, correct word usage, and knowing authors of great works.

My view of what English teaching should be, and the way it could respond to the challenge of difference, is also informed by my involvement as a feminist and by my engagement with postmodernism.
Feminisms’ Differences
I have implied already that feminist English teaching with its response to issues of gender difference can be more than the traditional liberal feminist approach. It is not just a matter of changing some authors and topics, using nonsexist language, getting the girls to talk more and encouraging the boys to read and write more, (and more quietly!) although these may be productive outcomes and may be indicators that a feminist teacher has been at work. Feminism challenges us towards a much profounder revolution than that of merely firing the canon.

The current feminist movement that emerged from the sixties is insistent on the need to bring about changes in the personal and political lives of women and girls. Schooling can play some part in this process for change, though I do not believe as many conservatives do that it can be held responsible for most of the current ills of postmodern capitalism. I know that boys and men also have to work towards ways of changing their prospects, stereotypes and other barriers that plague their chance for freedom. However women and girls clearly suffer more from the sexism of our communities - economically, sexually, personally, and intellectually. And as a feminist it is towards women that I direct my energies to work for change.

It is possible within the classroom to choose styles of teaching and learning which ensure positive representation and image making, and create a relationship and an environment which allow girls and women to construct for themselves ways of feeling female which are valued and respected.

The feminist English teacher (also a learner) will be one who begins by being a model, not in the to-be-imitated or cloning sense, but in the sense of being a demonstrator. The teacher needs to be ‘doing-it-too’. Her behaviour in the classroom is best if it is not unduly behaviour controlling. The exception to this must be in cases of sexual harassment and sexist behaviour of any kind, when clear leadership to constrain such behaviour is important. Apart from such examples I think we need a ‘let’s question why this is happening’, example-setting style. It is not so much a matter of questioning why the girls are behaving or responding as they do, but of asking why the boys feel obliged to behave as they do. Spivak (1991) makes
this point, that as much as we need to reclaim space and opportunity for women, we have to ask men to question what they have taken and why they have overlooked sharing power with women. These strategies are part of deconstructionist ways of thinking and writing.

A feminist approach to English teaching will have to touch on all aspects of the classroom experience and will take a holistic approach, both in recognising the needs of the whole person, and in refusing to separate the various components of the teaching programme. Instead of teaching reading separately from comprehension, or writing from oral work, or drama from literature, the English teacher will use these different strands of the English curriculum in an interconnected way. (This approach is part of the national curriculum document for English in New Zealand, and may be result of the contribution of the feminist English teachers who worked on the curriculum development right through the 1980s.)

Just as the feminist movement discovered the personal to be inseparable from the political, so the feminist English teacher will look to finding ways of connecting the experiences and pasts of the language learners with the curriculum of the classroom. She will consider the emotional needs of the students, their involvement at an affective level with their learning and responding. Respect for the voices of the learners, perhaps through autobiography, journals, informal discussion, shared responses, and involving the teacher too, are all characteristics of a classroom atmosphere which encourages emotional engagement with the learning experience. All this prepares the way for setting up the right to, and the rites of, response to texts and experiences.

Feminist teaching will also need to be aware of possible differences in approaches to learning, and it is particularly important that we consider the impact of different traditions of thinking which have affected the learning of girls, and therefore the different nature of their intellectual inheritance. At a basic level this means we have to be careful not to imply different sets of expectations across gender, race and class difference. But more subtle is the influence on girls of a different way of thinking about themselves as learners, of their intellectual and later working lives as being only part of their expected life experience. Leisure time aside, boys have the tradition, through conditioning and inheritance, of perceiving themselves more
single-mindedly (Mickelson 1989). They are more responsible and dependent for their sense of themselves and place in life on their education, training and employment. Boys tend to see the outcome of their education as important, rather than the process and progress of their day to day experience in the classroom, and this is reflected in their classroom behaviours.

Even today girls are less measured by, less encouraged and given less access to the openings of work and career beyond education. They seem to give more emphasis and energy to the day to day process of the classroom learning, to the progress they want to make within it. We can see this from the increased success of girls in English programmes which are assessed internally (with course work) rather than by external examinations.

As feminist teachers, we need to re-examine what it is that girls and boys are achieving in the English classroom when they are said to be achievers (usually the girls), or underachievers (usually the boys). Who is being set up for success within the classroom itself, and who is being set up for success beyond it which leads to more potential for power? In addition to gender, what impact does the overlapping of race and class have on this, in the lives of our students?

Feminist English teachers need to be ‘out’ about what we are doing. As a feminist English teacher I need to be clear, honest, on the level (so to speak) with the other learners in the classroom community. Part of this being ‘out’ will be reflected in the choices of materials which feminist teachers use, and in the ways in which we help students look at the materials (the texts) which are more usually on offer. As girls and women we have too often spent our time reflecting, encouraging, admiring the interests, exploits, achievements of men and boys, as Virginia Woolf has pointed out (Woolf 1929). It is culturally accepted, indeed encouraged, for men to not be interested in women’s achievements, but for women it is not at all accepted nor acceptable to be bored with or dismissive of men’s activities. A feminist teacher can ask boys to explain why they have problems reading material which involves the experiences and interests of girls.

No doubt here will be some drama if these sorts of revolutionary approaches are used in the classroom. We know from Dale Spender's work
that hostility from boys is a common reaction to the strategies of feminist teachers (spender and Sarah, eds 1988). But like the wise director of any play, we teachers must ask the learners to think deeply about the roles they have taken on (perhaps through the use of personal journal writing), why they make sense to them, how they can develop them in order to surprise the audience of our communities with new interpretations and possibilities emerging out of the familiar set pieces. A feminist script for the classroom requires new ways of playing roles.

Yes, we will be questioning differently. And we will need to teach students new strategies for dealing with these questions. One of the most significant strategies will be reflexivity, which needs embedding in the teaching style of feminist and other radical teachers, as well as practised by the learners in the classroom. In order for us, teachers and learners, to acquire a reflexive approach, we need some training in ways of receiving texts, knowledge, instructions, and questions. Reception of texts needs to be in the context of being able to question the way things are. What expectations do we have of a learning experience such as reading a poem, or the requirements for a piece of writing? How are these expectations precluding our openness to the task, to the ideas, to the possibilities? The reactions and interactions of encountering new possibilities of reception will make up a reflexive way of teaching and learning, rather than an 'acceptive' model which is rather too prevalent in many English classrooms.

Postmodernism: different, again and again?
The influence of postmodernism on our way of thinking, and its intersection and overlap with many aspects of feminism is fraught with difficulty. Yet it also offers some important and useful concepts for educationalists, practitioners and theorists alike. It has forced me to rethink what I once held as 'fundamental truths' of my English teaching, leading me at first to a position where I felt confronted by a powerlessness to act. If nothing was 'true', and no-one's experience 'valid' in another situation, how could we prepare students for their future lives? What would we teach? Who was I?

The ideas of postmodern theorists, and the strategies that have emerged from the poststructuralists and deconstructionism have eventually led me
to a reconsideration but not necessarily to an outright rejection of my approaches to English teaching.

The challenge about what and whose knowledge should be represented in the feminist English classroom also leads to the question, well, who knows? If there is no neutral, correct knowledge to pass on, what is the purpose of the classroom, and the role of the teacher? If we begin to consider that the student is a subject of education, and not its object; that the teacher is also another subject located within the educational discourse, then we need to dismantle our old paradigms of teaching and learning, even the progressive ones such as those called student-centred.

The student-centred paradigm is not one to reject completely, but postmodernism and feminism too would both question its over-emphasis on 'making meaning', and on its belief that relevance is the core of a good curriculum. Students within such classrooms are encouraged to find their identity, rather than to question the construction of identity and to critique the evaluation of paradigms which society uses to measure and weigh various identities against each other. The problem with focusing on student-centredness in our classrooms lies in the potential it has to leave learners without a sense of their contexts. English classrooms need to be student-centred in that students' lives and experiences are valued, and their responses valorised. But we must also teach them to see where those experiences and responses have emerged from, how they have been constructed, and how to critique them reflexively. Foucault said that one of the most important things a teacher or academic can do is to bring about the possibility of changing something in the minds of people⁴, and this needs to be the heart of postmodern feminist English teaching. Foucault is not talking about changing people's minds from one set of ideas to another in the sense akin to evangelism or propaganda-ism, but about the need for people to be aware that changes in how we perceive and understand are always on the cards. We can always re-think, deconstruct, reconsider in the light of a new or different perception, experience or shifted location. It is a right we are entitled to, the right to change something about our present way of thinking. (A woman's right to change her mind?)

Postmodernism throws out the challenge to us to reconsider what we mean by the term English as a subject in the school curriculum. It invites us to do
more than add a wider choice of topics and titles and ‘permit’ different accents and variations of English in our classrooms. It asks us to examine not what we can help our students to know about English, but if we can help them understand and confront how they have been constituted, that is, constructed and interpreted, in relation to what English has been defined as, and in relation to what being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ at it means.

Foucault and other postmodernists have brought some changes about to my way of thinking as a teacher, but not always to the point of giving me the traditional intellectual satisfaction of feeling that I now understand the new truth. I have had to abandon a belief in new or better truths, and be content with ever increasing numbers of questions. I am not implying that my involvement with these issues means that I now have a better basis for teaching English. Can we call development progress? That is what Lyotard asks (Lyotard 1993, p76). Very often it just feels like more of a muddle.

However, I have found these ideas useful in combating attempts by our current education system in New Zealand to modularise the English curriculum, to confine it within definable unit standards or separate competencies where the end is foreseen, prescribed, ordained, even before classes and teachers have met. (Do the political masters of education now consider themselves gods that they can so ordain?) There is a type of educational harassment around, administrators harassing teachers and students with outcomes, productivity requirements, and evidence of excellence. Fear of failure, of the cutting of funds, loss of teachers’ jobs, and the threat of future, permanent unemployment for many our students are becoming common driving forces behind school policies leading to the attitude: let’s make simple attainable goals so that we can show ‘them’ that we are a successful school or programme. Postmodernism reminds us to question the value, the rightfulness, the integrity of such approaches to teaching and learning.

Much of the criticism of English teaching recently has come from those who fear that an expansion of the curriculum will dilute it, and mean that the great works of literature and excellent examples of style will be crowded out by a curriculum that attempts to include representation of the many different voices emerging in our schools. The complaint is that we won’t be able to rely any more on a common knowledge base, and quite overlooks
the fact that the so-called common knowledge has always been the privilege of a very small class of people within the English speaking world.

But ignoring the elitism of this complaint, is there something to be lost if we abandon a common core of texts in the teaching of English? I am beginning to believe that postmodern feminist teaching might be able to find ways other than through the reading of particular great titles to arrive at similar ends. The named great works are said to be important because they deal with the deepest, significant, essential (a dangerous word in postmodern contexts!) truths of our experiences of living. But the lives of all the members of a classroom community are also sources of such experiences and can be tapped, along with the (hi)stories of their families and cultures. Perhaps the conservatives would add to their argument that the great writers are also exemplary in their style and express themselves so much better than we do in classroom discussions and writing sessions. We could reply in two ways: one would be to debate the meanings of exemplary and better; the other would be to look at the great works in relation to the great lives of our classroom communities. In such a relationship we may find the merging of living, language and literature. We might, with our students, recognise ourselves differently in the light of what we read and hear from others. We might also understand more that writers and their great works emanate from specific times and from certain constructed life experiences of these writers.

Rather than ‘knowing’ a great work, learners in the English classroom need to engage with the text, recognise in it certain connections with or difference from their own circumstances. This is the ‘making meaning’ part. Then they can learn to critique both the work and their own reactions, and emerge from the learning encounter less intimidated, more willing to encounter other texts, and able to recognise any changes in their minds that might have taken place. Recognition rather than identification might become a useful concept in our teaching of English. I see a need in our English teaching for a sense of revolving interrogation, an always being prepared to come back and re-open the discussion, reconsider the text. We need more knowing but with less assurance. The problem with having to come too quickly to conclusions or closures to meet required outcomes, is that we become so committed to them that we can’t see when they have outlived their usefulness.
I find I can not accept an anything goes, everything is at the same level principle, but I can find it useful as a strategy for teaching. Learning begins from a premise that its possibilities are open and endless. Not a ‘what I am or know means that...’ approach, but an opportunity to decide, within our specific location, what we want to be (Brown 1991). So our teaching learning questions are: what’s available? what can happen? where am I up to at this stage? where do different paths lead? how does this change things? what do I want from this? what interactions have been set up from this? In other words they are subject-centred, critical and reflexive questions of genuine inquiry.

‘Anything goes’ is perhaps the opening card which the postmodern feminist teacher should throw upon the table. In the learning process as the learner recognises and begins to write and read herself, she also ‘exposes’ herself and will want to have some security buffers. The feminist teacher must supply safe places and strategies for those explorations to start.

Perhaps, in the wrong way, the English classroom of the past has been too safe a place, too dependent on the teacher and the syllabus requirements, too sure of what it is doing. It has been too easily known by the compliant student, too rigid for the student not provided for by its monoculturalism. The ‘what is to be known’ has been too specific - confining, defining, and excluding. Our classrooms are full of rituals requiring particular patterns of behaviour. Feminists, postmodernists and English teachers need to challenge these patterns, protesting against being locked in by comprehension. We need instead a promise that in our classrooms anything might be possible, but it may not pass without critique.

[ This is a shortened version of an article published in English International - a journal of the International Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1993.]

Notes


2 The New Zealand English curriculum divides language into different strands in an attempt to broaden the strategies which teachers use in their language programme. ‘listening, presenting and viewing’ are three of these strands. Presenting refers to an awareness of different ways in which language can be represented, visually in design and layout, and through different performance genres; viewing refers to the way we watch and receive communication from observation.

3 “My role - that is too emphatic a word - is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed. To change something in the minds of people, that’s the role of an intellectual.” Foucault quoted in Stephen J. Ball (1990)*Foucault and Education*, (Routledge, London, p 1.)
How will it end?


A momentous day - the end of my 4th year of working on this thesis.

For the first time since I began this project I have some doubts about finishing it. Perhaps it is quite typical to be near the end and begin to doubt the worth of the work, its ability to make a contribution, the sense that it has been so intensely a personal experience that it could not possibly be of significance to anyone. Mmmmm, I hope the feeling doesn’t become too strong, especially over these weeks when I have the opportunity to work exclusively on it and make some final progress.

My interest hasn’t waned though. I even wonder what I will fill my thinking time with when it is finished, and to some extent it has been something to hide behind. I can’t do this or that because of the PhD!!

But perhaps all that needs to be put behind in a more disciplined attempt to get on. I have started a chapter on the person of the feminist teacher - Getting Personal - a telling friend? And I am beginning to realise that the feminist teacher for all that she is concerned primarily about the quality of the learning experiences for girls, actually as a feminist brings a totally different style and manner to the classroom. The whole basis of the knowledge from which she works, of the personal style she will adopt, of the understanding she has of authority, of her relationship with the institutional side of the educative processes is other from the way in which education is currently conducted. When Virginia Woolf comments about highly successful people in the professions having lost their senses, not only does she see them as having gone mad, but that they have lost touch with that all-powerful side of themselves which keeps them centred on what is really important about their work. She describes them as without sight, sound, speech in other words without the ability to relate fully to those around them. In relation to knowledge within the schooling sphere when teachers lose their sense of being in touch with the knowledge which they are employing and simply see it as being a product on a conveyor belt, then something at the heart of the purpose of learning and teaching disappears. Feminist teachers for whom knowledge has had to be rethought, rediscovered, claimed, authored, and named understand what a difference can be made to the learning experience when the senses and the emotions and the intellect are all connected; when learning springs from an identified position, through personalised understanding, via critical attention and reflection towards new and usable transferable skills and understandings.

I think this specific project will be finished after all, but where will feminist pedagogies end?
Chapter Ten

From Paradigms Towards Virtual Feminist Realities for Schooling

Single vision produces more illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters
- Donna Haraway A Manifesto for Cyborgs

Classrooms are events which continue to happen daily. They are political, intellectual and social events in which at every moment, experiences of life are being constructed, reconstructed, patterned and normalised. Students and teachers become addicted to what they are told is the reality of the classroom and the world beyond it. That is, they become so accustomed to the routines which have been established that they find it increasingly difficult to accept change. While conservative politicians and members of the public argue to keep ‘social-engineering feminists’ out of power in schools, and feminists and other critical pedagogues argue among themselves about which has more legitimacy, these addictions, or routines, become entrenched, and schooling is not transformed. Whatever the debates about feminisms, within the feminist community and beyond it, we need to be able to take whatever elements we can from them so that we can apply them to make a pedagogy which contributes to changes in the living experiences of women.

The debates within and around feminism between essentialism and anti-essentialism are extremely important in the context of pedagogy. The essentialist argument attributes certain qualities to women and to men, giving each sex particular strengths and characteristics. These characteristics become features around which women can identify their experiences and share common understandings. At the start of the second wave of the feminist movement during the late sixties and seventies a focus on these common experiences enabled feminist educators to identify common experiences among girls in co-educational classrooms, to note the collective exclusion of women from the school
curriculum, to observe the inequality in women teachers’ careers by comparison with their male colleagues. It was a focus on the essential differences between girls’ experience of education and boys’ experience which brought significant changes to education for girls. In an equal opportunities, civil rights environment once we were made aware of the disadvantages under which girls and women in education worked, legislative and curriculum developments could be made to redress the wrongs. The ‘add women in’ phase was an important practical step forward and owes its success largely to the work of the essentialist feminist movement.

What became noticeable as time went on, however, was that the equal opportunities movement, as well as the add-women-in phase, accounted neither for differences among girls such as class or race, nor for the common experiences which some boys and girls shared because of race or class, cultural capital and learning styles. Feminist educators could not just lump all girls together and write a common educational plan for them without appearing to support some monolithic homogeneous view of who women are and how they ought to behave.

Difference theory offers women the chance to escape from dominating universal statements about what their natures are supposed to be. It allows women to differentiate themselves from men, and to recognise the different experiences which separate them out from each other. Difference theory attacks any idea of a sacred woman’s nature which emerges naturally from her biological make-up. Postmodern thinking has been important for feminism, for loosening the lasso which has been used to collect women together in one big bunch; for undermining any development of thought-police, controlling correct feminist thinking; for helping women see the extent to which they have been constructed as objects for the male subject of every situation; for placing us beyond the reach of accepted explanations for our ‘true nature’ (Laclau, in Giroux 1994, p115).

But feminists have a more passionate and urgent set of tasks than those just mentioned. We have had to find voices to express things that have not been heard in public before. We must write things about ourselves, our longings, needs and capabilities for the first time. We have to
imagine different ways of working as teachers in classrooms from those which have never taken us into account, except as lesser beings for whom different (that is, inferior) educational programmes have been written. We have had to do these things without there being a discourse of our own in place for us to use. We have had to create formulations and situations for which we have had no expressions, nor any parameters. And often, as we have tried new ways of speaking, or expressed first time experiences, or behaved differently, we have been identified as unnatural, incomprehensible, unbalanced and unfit. When more than one of us has experienced some of these things together we have been excited at finding each other; the sense of unity and mutual understanding has been a thing of great joy. Perhaps sometimes we have overemphasised these shared experiences at the expense of ‘difference’, but we have needed alliances, in albeit inappropriate efforts, to consolidate a discourse with which to communicate our experiences and desires.

When it comes to schooling what feminist teachers need to do is to take from both arguments, essentialist and anti-essentialist, the elements which will allow the learning experiences of students to flourish. In other words we need to look at what the essentialists have designated as ‘true’ women’s qualities, and at those identified as men’s qualities, then select from all of the qualities those that are supportive of critical and liberatory learning in a range of different classroom situations. Instead of polarising them, feminist teachers need to make use of them all, and display them on a continuum, leaving them all exposed and available for use by both boys and girls, women and men, when they need them.

A feminist revolution in education will be enacted when teachers and students realise that nothing about schooling is real, in the sense of being absolute or the right way teachers should do things in the classroom. Every learning strategy and many different kinds of knowledge are available to work with.

Patriarchal education structures and theories need to be pushed off their foundations and re-located on less privileged sites. Feminism(s), to be truly part of a radical pedagogy, have to start with a demolition programme. A feminist pedagogy will be not be content with an add-on approach, with being considered another perspective. Feminist
approaches to teaching and learning need to be constructed but not in the same sense as the theories which they will stand alongside were. Postmodern feminisms will not use bully-girl tactics to usurp another theory in order to replace it with their own new ideas. It will not be possible anyway to use just one theory to deal with all the issues, learning needs and concerns that we have as teachers and learners.

What I imagine as a feminist is a virtual-reality approach to theory. I, along with other feminists, need the opportunity and space to develop and play with theoretical concepts for our classrooms. These concepts must begin by re-valuing women both as teachers and learners. We need to go through the processes of establishing traditions and ‘roles of honour’ for the work which we and our foremothers have accomplished, as teachers and intellectuals of many different types. We need to reclaim those skills for which we were first sought as teachers - caring and nurturing, relatedness and the sociability skills similar to those which mothers employ and teach in the pre-oedipal stages of children’s development, and which have been repressed by the male dominated schooling structures that were built around the walls of the schoolyard, and around the public spheres of manliness.

We also need to concentrate on the modern newly emerging traditions of intellectual women and celebrate the speed with which women have been able to establish careers and reputations in philosophy, science, psychology, education, postmodernism, art, music and literature, establishing that the former exclusion of women from these spheres was not a result of ‘natural deficiencies’, but due to a deliberate withholding of opportunities for women by men.

These achievements, and recently emerging attributes and opportunities which are characteristic of many women’s public situations today, have to be acknowledged as important. But we must not run into the danger of claiming them as the new realities of how life for women in the twenty-first century will be. Rather we should try to see them as possible or virtual realities. What we need to do is work with them as if they are our realities, while at the same time internalising a knowledge that their reality is only illusionary. What we must avoid is so dominant a feeling that they are real and right that we try to develop them, our ways of
being, as paradigms for others to imitate. The last thing a feminist teacher wants is to replace one paradigm for working with her students with another, even if it is one modelled on feminists' experiences and achievements. There is nothing standard about women. We are not clones of each other. All those who participate in classrooms make contributions to them. There isn't a right way for a classroom to be. We have too long been restricted by the normalising constraints of patriarchal approaches to education so we must have no intentions of trying to create restrictive environments either for ourselves, or for men.

Feminist pedagogies demand a complete re-think of what constitutes learning and schooling. In this process they will use essentialist strategies to define the differences they want to introduce into the traditions of the schoolyard. They/we will build up a virtually-real list of descriptors for what elements we want to introduce into classrooms and other learning areas. We need to name these features of feminist pedagogies as I have tried to do in other parts of this thesis, claim them and honour them as women's ways with and of learning and teaching. But then, rather than insisting on them as the way to do things we simply offer them as contributions to what exists already in the traditions and conditions of classrooms.

Feminist pedagogies do however need to be offered vociferously and with confidence, because we are still living through patriarchal times in which we cannot assume that the normative identification of humanity with men and masculinity has been fully debunked (Mann 1994). So the voices of feminists need to disrupt the patriarchal world and topple it from its axis. Its illusion of a single way of the world has to be shattered.

The current postmodernist phase of challenging monocultural, homogeneous, universal narratives has assisted feminists in finding a place for themselves to speak from, but it has not sufficiently confronted the patriarchal world with what it means to exchange a dominant position for shared and changing positions. Most men experience the shifts brought by postmodernism and feminism as minor, sometimes irritating, even sometimes quite advantageous. We now have many liberated, educated, confident women who can earn their own living needs, and still bear and rear children, while remaining focussed on
men's needs and continuing to allow themselves to be controlled by male images of how women should be and look. There are so many examples of the ways in which women changed by feminisms' efforts, remain attached to keeping up the images required of them by many men, but one which dominates my thinking at the moment is that of a woman reviewer in the New Zealand Sunday Times, 28/4/96, who mentioned the two Arts programmes on Sunday mornings, one on TV1, the other on TV3. Her entire comment on these two shows, both new to air, was taken up by an exposé of the potential embarrassment for the two women presenters of the shows because they both buy clothes from the same shop. What a problem it would be if they both appeared on opposite channels in the same outfit, she proclaimed.

All three women who feature in this example hold professional positions only recently readily available to women. The reviewer herself is a feature writer for the Sunday newspaper, the two television presenters are high profile, experienced professionals. Yet one plays the other two off against each other, in public, for something not remotely connected to the purpose of their work; for something which fits in with the objectifying of women as fashion figures, as focussed on their appearances and making themselves attractive and distinctive through their wearing of fashions. Nothing is mentioned about the content of their programmes, nor about their success or otherwise as professionals. Can we imagine for a minute a reporter, male or female, checking on which clothes stores two male television reporters use for purchasing their outfits? Or for reporting only on the appearances of the two men when they were both appearing for the first time in rival shows? What depth of psychological conditioning has gone on in women for such a report to be even thought of fleetingly, let alone to have gone through all the highly conscious and deliberate processes of having been chosen as the topic for a weekly round up of television reviews, then written up, processed, edited and finally printed? There were so many points at which the material could have been reconsidered, but it wasn't.

Patricia Mann (1994) has argued that the liberation of women has been and continues to be an extremely difficult process because as we have moved out of the domestic sphere, demanding education and work, recreational opportunities and independent use of our time, we have left
an enormous gap in what was once a more stable family unit. This gap is not just in the provision of domestic services, it is also in the “psychic relational forms of human nature” (ibid). Women’s formerly exclusive roles as nurturers of early childhood and developing interpersonal relationships have been disrupted as they have moved to take on many more public roles. The time they used to focus on home and family is now shared among many other responsibilities. It has not been replaced and there is a gap in our caring for our youngest members of society. As well, she argues, women’s moves into the more public spheres of paid work were done without the support, domestic or emotional, which men received and often still do as they have moved out into careers and other paid employment.

Clearly schools and other workplaces need to examine the gaps left by women’s shifts into the public domains, and to engage in much more effective ways of meeting the newly developing needs of people, children and adults. Feminist pedagogies, capitalising on the strengths of women, should take the initiative in devising school climates which allow for the development of effective and affective interpersonal relationships. Feminist pedagogy could lead to reconfiguration of the possibilities for schooling, and encourage a total reconsideration of the existing paradigms constructed almost entirely by pre-feminist, male theorists whose work, along with the historical and political assumptions about schooling and its purposes, continue to pre-determine the actions of teachers, the development of curriculum, the learning behaviours and reactions of most students in our classrooms.

In developing feminist pedagogies a significant component will be how we set up a relationship between theory and practice. I have said earlier that I consider it important that theory and practice are not seen as at odds with each other; and that rather than being opposite ends of a binary pair they coalesce as theory becomes practical when it is applied. There is a point when one merges with the other, so that within a feminist pedagogy they both continue to transform each other. What feminist pedagogy does not want is to promote a relationship between theory and practice which causes one or both to become fixed and finalised. Feminists cannot afford to have situation where they have
ceased to think about their theoretical positions. Nor can we arrive at a
time when we consider we have the practice sorted out, tied up.
There is another way in which theory offers opportunities for feminisms
to explore new territories. Theory does not ‘exist in reality’ any more
than we can accept that an essential nature of women exists, other than
for impermanent strategic purposes. Theory is that which is thinkable. It
is an in-the-mind position which exists only symbolically, in and through
language. However, through and in theory, feminists are able to conceive
of ideas as if they do exist, in worlds of virtual reality; we are able to
imagine, and image, and move through possibilities or scenarios of lived
events to which women have not traditionally had access. In theory we
can dismiss the constraints of the body, of the enculturated experiences
of women, of the objectified positions normally handed to us. Instead we
can experience through the virtual reality of theory what it would be like,
for example, to have the qualities of nurturing and affective interactions
admired and used as grounds for promotion; or of how it would be to
exist within a normalised discourse rather than to be only a creation, as
an other, within the normal discourse. Only in theory can new discourses
such as feminists desire ever exist. Even if it were possible to live in a
time when women had transformed the world to reflect their own
imaginings, that transformation in itself having become a ‘reality’ or ‘way
of truth’ would be just another dogma, just any other discourse of
oppression and exclusion.

As a result I no longer believe that we can pronounce theory from which
definitive practice is developed, because what matters in the end is
neither the theory, nor the lived practical experience it might engender,
but the process and passage of transition between the two. (I have
explored the limitations of definitions and definitives in the chapter on
imagining feminist classrooms.) In other words, what we need are
feminist teachers who are constantly in the process of thinking
theoretically and imagining possible practices which might result from
the theory. Continuing to exist within that transitional passage is what
will sustain our most radical capabilities. It is in that phase between
leaving behind one discourse and all the lived experience which it has
created for us, and moving towards a new discourse, but before we have
arrived at it, that we are able to develop thinking about new possibilities.
Newness and transformation exist only before they are arrived at. Once
they are established they become constraints. Only in that transition phase, that stage of virtual post-feminism, when we imagine a time in which men are not automatically seen as what constitutes human, and before the new discourse is constituted, can women have real freedom to dream of what we desire. The moments of pre-feminist-discourse are the most creative times, before things become fixed, before experiences become lived. These are the times when we can most easily dreamlive a virtually real feminist discourse. This ‘dreamliving’ of purely feminist dreams, is what will inspire the actual living, the teaching and learning of tangible feminist pedagogies.

In postmodern times it may have become impossible to believe that we can be direct agents of change, that we can influence and change without being oppressive. Postmodernism has taught me of the implicated power of all my actions, of the absence of any fixed or predictable reality of my actions. It has for me disputed the existence of ‘my real nature’, and ‘true individuality’. My theoretical grappling with these challenges which have been absolutely fundamental, has been what has liberated my thinking and my imaginings. I have ceased to think that I can plan for some new feminist time or space where all women will be transformed, because it is no longer possible to assume what transformation of a feminist kind will mean for different women. There will be no coherent time when women as a group will want a homogenous transformation. We are all involved in too many different variable situations and connections to ever be able to understand together what a new feminist reality would be.

However postmodern fragmentation, and undermining of hegemonic thinking and experience, coupled with a virtual reality dream of what differences feminism needs to make, have created for me a noetic-space, a space of entirely intellectual imaginings, within which I can conceive of feminist teachers using their skills to transform their classrooms into politically active, critically aware, cognitively challenging and emotionally alive environments in which learners are not at the beginning or ending of their education but constantly shifting ground towards new or reconstituted areas of exploration. Feminist teachers will be participants in these shifting, transforming environments, not setting up paradigms to constrain the limits within which learners can work, but
opening up intellectual imaginings and emotional sensitivities within students, so that they too can trust theoretical moments to try out their thinking possibilities, and test their emotional sensitivities to virtually experience ‘knowing about’ something or some situation.

I have come to the conclusion that we will not find a new elixir for transforming learning and teaching. There won’t be someone who will annunciate a new theory or particular praxis which suddenly illuminates the classroom experience of every teacher and learner. What we need instead are feminist teachers with intellectual and imaginative powers and a commitment to constantly moving towards new possibilities without ever arriving, to be able to bring together a classroom experience in which women claim and champion the attributes which have been laid at their feet, which open up learning experiences in a democratic way. We need to offer the virtual reality of women’s ways of knowing to students, both boys and girls, in an environment in which both girls and boys feel no distractions, no inhibitions about picking up and using whatever learning tools they need to help them develop the skills of critique and reflection with which to transform their own experiences of learning and teaching.

I will not define and prescribe a particular feminist pedagogy with specific characteristics and stages and strategies. Nor do I think it is possible, unless we were to move into a post-feminist era, to invite men to be feminist teachers, because their bodies can not be read as feminist texts, they are not written on the body as women, they are written as men and stand for patriarchy. I would invite them to be supportive of feminist possibilities and to use feminist practices, but not to be representatives of feminisms. I dream of women teachers, who are working through some of the many aspects and differences of feminisms, who have a desire to imagine a different range of experiences for themselves and for other women, who are prepared not to resolve their classroom strategies into a set of formulae, but to allow their theoretical, virtually real imaginings to guide an ever flexible and responsive classroom practice, who will develop a liberatory, critical and reflective set of learning opportunities which could alter the daily events of classrooms.
Bibliography


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