

**ENACTING A FEMINIST PEDAGOGY:
INTEGRATING WEBLOGS INTO THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM**

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CHAPTER I
ENTER STAGE LEFT: FEMINIST PEDAGOGY
AND BLOGGING TAKE THE STAGE

When I was a freshman in college, the first class I walked into was being held in an auditorium. It was not really a classroom per se—more like somewhere you would go to watch a dance recital. There were more than four hundred students buzzing around—most just as overwhelmed by the size of the class as I was. I took one of the first available chairs I saw. It was near the back, probably in row 49 out of 50. The professor took the “stage” equipped with a microphone and introduced himself as well as his three teaching assistants. He talked about “supplementary instruction” classes that would be taught on Wednesday evenings by the teaching assistants who, as he explained, were students who had made an ‘A’ in his class during the previous year. The professor hurried through the explanation of the syllabus, and then the first class was over.

All semester long, I continued to be amazed at the cattle-herding environment of the class. Exams were administered by anonymous proctors who matched the student ID to the student’s face, and then to a hefty paper class roster. When it was time to find out exam grades, students had to scramble to hunt for the last four digits of their social security number along a wall strewn with grade reports. The most interesting thing about this class, and others I eventually took in the same department, was that no questions were allowed. The professor explained that class time was too limited to have nearly 500 students ask questions, and therefore they were to be asked only in supplementary

instruction sessions (directed to the teaching assistants) or after class (if you happened to be one of the lucky few who could dodge through the crowd to make it to the front where the professor was gathering his things). That semester, I learned a little about the “Introduction to Business Administration,” but I learned even more about how weak my voice was as student in a sea of 45,000 other students.

Having attended a huge high school, I knew what it meant to be part of a large academic cluster in overfilled classes. But, I did have some reprieve in my jam-packed public school experience, as it was diluted by my half-day participation at an offshoot magnet campus where I was exposed to classes with less than 15 students. In these small classes, students were active participants in the class conversation. We were not relegated to the back of a packed classroom as mere voyeurs watching the teacher’s lecture. We sat at large round tables, or often on the floor with pillows in casual circles alongside our teacher. Typically, we were given assignments that crossed the curriculum, which meant that students had the freedom to set their own schedules, explore their own topic choices, and write about one class’s content for another class. For example, if I were writing a paper for my English class, I might have been encouraged to choose a topic pertaining to my anatomy class, and I then would turn it in to both my English and anatomy teachers. This perpetuated a connectedness in my studies, as well as my thinking, and moreover, helped build the strength of my voice as a student. After all, coordinating assignments that bridge multiple classes require students to thoroughly research their interests and present their findings and ideas to multiple teachers.

My perfect academic world was rocked every single day though when it was time to board the school bus back to my main high school campus. Despite my attendance in honors courses, my afternoon experiences in a high school with more than 5,000 students were starkly different from my experiences in a homey and embrative magnet school setting. Day after day I would leave a world where teachers could give individual attention to their students by encouraging peer interaction, topic creativity, and exploration to join a contrasting world where successful standardized testing and meeting basic checklist requirements were the only goals. More than thirty students crammed small classrooms, and endured the short lesson of the day. Teachers were accessible for questions, but only briefly because inevitably, another class of thirty more high schoolers was about to be packed in. Despite my lack of formal training, it was clear to me that certain academic settings and techniques are conducive to encouraging the development of individual student voices and interests, while other settings and techniques are not.

THE ART OF TEACHING

As I began developing my scholarship within the field of rhetoric and composition, I drew from my past and present experiences to shape my research interests in pedagogy, which can be defined simply as “the art of teaching” (DiGeorgio-Lutz 83). While I understand that class size is the most obvious difference in both my first college class experience as well as those in my high schools, I believe that large class size can be overcome. On many high school and college campuses, large class sizes are a way of life

because school funding for more teachers and more classroom space is tight.

Unfortunately, reality does not always permit smaller, more intimate classes where students can sit around on pillows on the floor and have thoughtful discussions with their peers and instructor. That said, we cannot allow large classes to continue to marginalize student voices and stifle self-expression. Despite knowing that there is not a lot we can do to reduce class sizes in schools, we know for sure that students need to stop being herded through their educational experiences and being identified by their social security numbers instead of by name. Research has shown that when students are given more personalized attention, students' "academic engagement" is heightened, and therefore, the quality of their education is enhanced (Finn, et al. 323). My interests in giving students equal opportunities for sharing their voices and ideas, as well as teaching students how to become better writers, has led to my research in critical feminist pedagogy. It is the thoughtful nature of critical feminist pedagogy--the constant attention paid to detail and viewing the world through other peoples' eyes that has inspired me to want to learn more and make me believe that it really can make a difference in the classroom and in students' lives. This teaching style, combined with the popularity and usefulness of technology in the 21st century, provides the theoretical underpinning for this thesis.

For nearly half a century, the fundamentals of feminist pedagogy have been consciously employed in classrooms across the country. In an effort to eliminate marginalized student voices by valuing self-discovery and interaction, feminist pedagogy has become naturally situated in composition classrooms (Stoecker, et al. 333). In recent

years, weblogs (shortened to “blogs”) have also become increasingly more prevalent, and have even begun to find their way into classroom settings. Both critical feminist pedagogy and blogs strive to give students equal voices, promote introspection, and in the case of composition classrooms, encourage writing. Therefore, it is time to explore the possibilities that exist at the intersection of critical feminist pedagogy and blogs. Can blogs help to enact a critical feminist pedagogy and, if so how do blogs work to this end?

This thesis seeks to synthesize two bodies of well-researched work and thus fill a gap in the current conversation about the possible relationship between pedagogy and method. Most scholars agree on the potential usefulness of critical feminist pedagogy, as well as the potential usefulness of blogs in the classroom, but few have researched the use of blogs as an enactment of critical feminist pedagogy. I propose to study the research on critical feminist pedagogy and the research on blogging in relation to one another and, in doing so, provide a new layer to the existing conversation.

In Chapter Two, I explore feminist pedagogy and identity theory. I begin the first half of the chapter by explaining the roots of feminist pedagogy, as well as its relationship to critical pedagogy. Then I confront some common misconceptions about feminist pedagogy, explain its connection with the rhetorical tradition, and demonstrate how consistent review of one’s pedagogical practices keeps the teaching techniques fresh and useful. Next, I explain some of the resistance and obstacles feminist pedagogues face, and discuss the possibility of blogs as modern-day journals. In the second half of Chapter Two, I examine identity theory as a tenant of feminist pedagogy by explaining how

embracing students' social identities in the classroom can improve learning. Next, I discuss the ways in which instructors can help students overcome their "prescribed" academic identity, as well as the associated pressures. I then consider how the instructor's identity can impact students. Finally, I consider feminist pedagogy's role as a "thoughtful" way to teach.

CHAPTER II

THE UNDERPINNING: A DISCUSSION OF CRITICAL FEMINIST PEDAGOGY AND IDENTITY THEORY

CRITICAL FEMINIST PEDAGOGY

The roots of feminist pedagogy are embedded in the feminist movement of the 1960s. What began as an effort to lessen the oppression of women has evolved into a successful classroom movement that addresses “issues of diversity, oppression, and tolerance [and] enables students to locate margins and peripheries, as well as to see who lives there and why” (Torrens and Riley 72). Feminist pedagogues believe in sharing the authority with their students to create an environment that values open communication, critical self-discovery, shared learning, and active participation (Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald 4). This communicative environment, one that aims to diminish the existence of marginalized voices, takes persistent, conscious decisions to maintain. In a culture where traditional didactic lectures, the Socratic method, and rigorous examinations reign supreme, feminist pedagogues must remain mindful of their goals and be vigilant in achieving them.

As early as 1971, Florence Howe, in her essay, “Identity and Expression: A Writing Course for Women,” explains how she used feminist pedagogical principles to overcome the extreme “passivity” and “dependency of women students” and lead them down an academic path to identity and expression (34). She begins by explaining how she encouraged her students to keep journals and write “argument” papers—all while

allowing them the “freedom and independence to experiment with both form and subject (37). These techniques, coupled with class discussions and debates that often began with the instructor’s open-ended questions, help break the “passive-dependent patterns and assumptions of inferiority” and help them “grow conscious of themselves as a women” (35). Howe’s forward-thinking and thoughtful use of pedagogy in her composition classes shows that for nearly four decades, feminist pedagogues have strived to have their students find their identities and express themselves, while simultaneously, become better writers.

During the four decades since Howe so consciously conducted her composition class, feminist pedagogy and the tenets of critical pedagogy that inform feminist pedagogy have continued to evolve, although definitions of each and their differences are hard to pin down. As mentioned in Chapter One, “pedagogy” can be defined simply as “the art of teaching” (DiGeorgio-Lutz 83). In fact, most scholars find it difficult to specifically define “feminist” and “critical” pedagogies concisely, therefore they resort to defining specific pedagogies by the goals the employment of such techniques strive to enact. For example, Frances Hoffmann and Jayne Stake define feminist pedagogy by the goals it attempts to accomplish, such as “participatory learning, validation of experience, encouragement of social understanding and activism, and development of critical thinking and open-mindedness” (80). Joe Kincheloe admits, “No matter how long I teach and write about critical pedagogy, I always find it difficult to define the term in a brief and compelling manner” (8). He goes onto explain that “critical pedagogy works to help

teacher educators and teachers reconstruct their work so it facilitates empowerment to all students” (9), and then resolves that “a central dimension of critical pedagogy involves the understanding and use of knowledge” (10). Although as readers, we typically prefer our definitions to be more direct and precise than these provided, the absence of one solid definition speaks to the complex nature of feminist and critical pedagogies, and rightfully embraces the goals of both pedagogies as the most central component to the conversation. Interestingly, looking at the objectives of both pedagogical practices shows how interwoven the tenets of feminist and critical pedagogy are.

A Branch of Critical Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy, often referred to as “critical feminist pedagogy,” parallels many of the same principals of traditional critical pedagogy. Like traditional critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy can provide instructors a different vantage point and understanding of how their role influences “race-, class-, and gender-divided society” (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 23). In doing so, instructors are afforded a greater awareness of “student experiences, texts, teacher ideologies” (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 23) that are commonly overlooked. By taking a closer look at how students perceive their environment, assignments, instructor, and overall academic experience, instructors can not only embrace what is unique about each student, but they can figure out a way to incorporate the differences into the classroom. Ideally, this will enable more student voices to be heard, motivate students to participate, and will further the ideals of feminist pedagogy and the promotion of critical thinking.

Feminist pedagogy, then, takes some of its cues from critical theorist Paulo Freire, who famously combated the concept of “banking education,” with his modern teaching philosophies, which he coined as “critical pedagogy,” believed that students were not merely empty glásses to be filled up with information by their instructor. Freire explains that the banking concept forces students to assume the passive role they are unfortunately used to. It further suffocates their creativity, prioritizes memorization over learning, and often times, results in a revolt because as Freire says, “One does not liberate people by alienating them” (79). Banking education would perpetuate the marginalization of student voices. Instead of a one-way conversation where the teacher holds all of the knowledge, a two-way conversation that respects the fact that students have to something contribute is more effective way to combat the unthoughtful, hegemonic normative that all too often is propagated in academia.

Although critical theorist and pedagogue Ira Shor agrees with Freire that the banking model is not the right pedagogical method to use, he explains that there are problems with the opposite extreme of “*not having enough authority*” [emphasis original] as well. He explains that we cannot forget the reality that classrooms often get out of control. He says, “In some cases, the *lack* of authority interferes with a teacher's ability to initiate a critical and power-sharing process” (Shor). Shor argues that all classrooms are different. A teacher might have more authority in one class than another, and it is important that teachers stay malleable and continue to recognize their students’ needs, the surroundings, the subject, the coursework, the school, and all of the intangible

things that comprise life in a classroom. Student needs are shaped by their surroundings, and it is critical for teachers to stay flexible continue to strive for creative ways to connect with their students to foster greater learning.

Misconceptions of Critical Feminist Pedagogy

A common misconception about feminist pedagogy is that it focuses entirely on halting the oppression of women. Certainly, it began that way and is an extremely useful byproduct of the major feminist movement of the 1960s that most people think of, but feminist pedagogy has evolved into something so much larger. Even though the oppression of women still widely exists today, feminist in the classroom are more concerned with the possible oppression of *all* people, and seek to empower them for equality (Sandell 180). Although I recognize and greatly appreciate the roots of feminist pedagogy as a movement to lessen the oppression of women, I use the term in this project to indicate lessening the oppression of all voices in the classroom. Often times, this has to do with race, class, gender, or sexual orientation, but it is also refers to people who are inherently oppressed in academic settings because they might learn differently. Giving choices for assignments, encouraging self-expression and self-exploration is undoubtedly of a feminist nature because it creates a thoughtful outlet for learning and it was feminist theory and pedagogy in composition studies which, along with process theory, that emphasized these goals in writing (Stoecker, et al. 333). Moreover, it encourages students to think critically and improve their skills as students--and even as human beings who are a small but integral part of something larger.

Another misconception associated with feminist pedagogy is that process is prioritized so much greater than product that the traditional grading process becomes inapplicable. Drawing their own conclusions, people might mistakenly conceive that students are given a “free pass” to earn a desirable grade. Valuing process over product and student-centered learning does not mean that students will earn an “easy ‘A.’” Even when considered from the strictest feminist perspectives, placing a grade on a student’s final product will not necessarily stifle their creativity and exploration. In this way, some of the rigorous feminist principals must be dismantled slightly to ensure that the teacher still retains enough authority (Clark, et al. 138). Even in feminist classrooms, students must still *earn* their grades. In feminist pedagogy, the main difference in grading is that student work may be valued differently so that their intentions and effort are weighted more heavily than in traditional classes where nothing more than multiple-choice tests are administered for a survey of the final results. But, certainly, the students must know that despite the teacher circling around them and valuing their input, the teacher’s authority still exists, and as in any class, at the end of each project and certainly at the end of the semester, their participation and work will still be assessed by the instructor for a grade.

In addition, feminist instructors are often perceived as prioritizing their feminist viewpoints above the education of their students. It is not the goal of feminist pedagogues to force their students to become feminists, but to use the principles of a useful pedagogy to better facilitate teaching their class. In their essay “‘Truth’ and Advocacy: A Feminist Perspective,” JoAnne Myers and Joan Tronto explain that feminist professors often have

to fend off the perceived fallacy that they “do not share the time-honored commitment in the pursuit of ‘truth,’ but are instead attempting to recruit students to their causes(s), and to indoctrinate rather than instruct” (808). It is an absurd notion that any good instructor would place their personal agenda of “recruiting” students to their cause above teaching their students—especially when it comes to a pedagogy that so heavily honors individual voices.

Ties to the Rhetorical Tradition

Feminist instructors’ emphasis on voice and personal truth has roots in classical rhetoric. As I mentioned earlier, valuing process over product leads to high hopes that instructors’ pedagogical methods will result in wiser students who have are able to find their own “personal truth,” however socially and historically saturated this personal truth is. Unlike Plato, then, who believed in the existence of transcendent truth, this notion of absolute truth does not seem a part of feminist pedagogy. The fact that “we somehow ‘knew’ it before our birth, when our souls were with the Divine” (Bizzell and Herzberg 81) seems opposite to the feminist viewpoint that everyone can find their true voice through dedication, learning, and hard work. And although the Sophists didn’t believe that humans could reach the level of absolute truth, they did believe students could be taught that it is possible reach their human potential (Bizzell and Herzberg 23). Reaching one’s human potential through dedication, self-discovery, and hard work is much more along the lines of the type of “truth” feminist pedagogy is seeking.

It is no surprise that feminist pedagogues want to do away with oppression altogether, want all people to find their voice, and want them to develop into “responsible, informed citizens” (Torrens and Riley 60), but it is interesting, once you take a closer look, how many of the practices of feminist pedagogy mirror those of the rhetorical tradition. Decentering authority is one of the staples of a classroom being run with a feminist pedagogical style. Decentering means that the power is shared and students are allowed to teach each other and to learn from one another (Torrens and Riley 62). The Socratic Method, although not necessarily definitively traced back to Socrates according to James Stuart Murray in his essay “Interpreting Plato on Sophistic Claims and the Provenance of the Socratic Method,” was a method revealed in Plato’s work allegedly about Socrates (116). It is defined as a “method of reasoned inquiry, in the form of philosophical conversation usually between two people, conducted through question and answer, and structured by the goal of moral self-improvement” (Benson Cain 3). Today, the Socratic Method, commonly used in law schools, is employed as an intense learning tool that puts students on the spot. An instructor using this method does not outwardly provide the answer to the student being questioned. This enables students to seek their own knowledge and find their own way to the conclusion, which means that the instructor must release some of their authority and refrain from directly telling the answer. This is quite possibly the beginning of enabling students to seek their own knowledge, and is one of the feminist pedagogical techniques that stems from an earlier time.

Keeping it Fresh

Debates about pedagogy keep teaching strategies fresh and evolving. Instructors bring their own set of experiences to their classrooms, and when new thoughts are contributed and applied to commonly used pedagogical practices, like critical feminist pedagogy, the practices are only made better. Just as I am advocating adding a new technological tool to the standard feminist pedagogical curriculum, Marjorie Kibby, in her essay “Hybrid Teaching and Learning: Pedagogy versus Pragmatism,” explains how beneficial the combination of various pedagogical practices and tools can provide the ultimate learning experience for students:

Using a hybrid mode to deliver learning activities enhances student learning in a number of ways, including making study more convenient, by allowing time shifting; improving interaction, by enabling considered responses to discussion; increasing individualized learning opportunities, through the ability to provide a menu of learning activities; providing a student-focused environment, where passive tasks such as note-taking are replaced by active experiences; developing core skills, including the ability to self- and peer-evaluate, and to apply logical, critical and creative thinking to information; and enabling support networks, from peer study groups to mentoring programs (88).

The hybrid approach Kibby advocates stems from a truly quintessential feminist pedagogical approach. She is seeing her students as individuals, and tailoring her

coursework to meet their learning needs. To enact this hybrid approach in a composition classroom, for example, instructors could assign readings at the beginning of each week and students could post blogged responses in their own time during the week. Then, each student would be required to respond to at least two of their classmates' posts. The posts need not be heavily academic, but they should be thoughtful and expressive. This will allow students to "shift" their time, interact with their peers even when not in the classroom, think critically, write, and do something different than standard written responses that are never shared. While putting the hybrid approach into action, Kibby advocates evaluating her own practices in order to keep them fresh and up-to-date, and most importantly, effective and appealing.

Part of the thoughtfulness that critical and feminist pedagogues enact in their classrooms through their chosen teaching style is a frequent and thorough review of their own pedagogical choices to ensure that their choices are meeting their students' needs, the goals of their class, and keeping current with the changing environment around them. In their book, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*, Jeffery Duncan-Andrade and Earnest Morrell explain that Freire "suggests that educators must constantly reflect on their pedagogy and its impact on relationships with students" (26). This heightened awareness of teaching choices, as well as been conscious of how things look in the classroom from the students points-of-view certainly requires more effort, but like Freire, I believe it is a staple of providing a quality education, and once implemented well, will in most cases, make the

instructor's job easier because students will be more at ease, participate more, and feel like a valued and equal partner in the class.

Social Action

A major reward of the thoughtfulness that goes into planning and running a class under feminist and critical pedagogies is the expectations of students to carry forth their knowledge and motivation into their communities. This call for social action is a way for students, as Freire says, to use their selves to “transform the world” (45). Building courses and assignments on the premise of student interest may spark students to go beyond the walls of classroom and take their newfound validation and excitement into the world to make a change. For example, a college composition instructor may create an assignment where students are asked to find, research, and write about a problem within their community. The assignment prompt for a first-year composition class may look like this:

Think of a problem in pop culture that has an effect on your life. Tell me how your view of the situation might differ due to your gender, age, and culture. Explain why you think this problem exists, what are the consequences, and carefully consider what could be done to solve or alleviate this problem. Do your best to maintain an academic style for this paper, but allow your personal voice and views to come through. Using outside sources is not absolutely necessary, but may be supportive to your argument. If you use outside sources, be sure to cite them correctly in MLA format, and if applicable, make sure you cite the source/problem you are reviewing. Your recommendation essay should be four to five double-spaced pages in length. This assignment accounts for 15% of your final grade.

In fulfilling this assignment, not only are students writing, they are thinking critically, and outlining the necessary steps to go forth and carry out *actual* change. The

conception of “change is more conceivable because there is no longer the illusion of some massive inertia to overcome” (Finke 166). This allows students to realize that making big changes does not require huge leaps, but instead baby steps that can be carefully planned and controlled.

Likewise, Kathleen Torrens and Jeannette Riley, in their article “Students Coming to Voice: The Transformative Influence of Feminist Pedagogies,” describe how the concepts of feminist pedagogy can be applied to classrooms to invoke change and greater critical thinking about current issues. Coined as “active feminist pedagogy,” this contemporary approach to feminist pedagogy goes beyond the typical calls for decentering the authority in the classroom, and actually encourages students to “debate issues intensely” and to “challenge one another’s ideas” (60). This, they explain, will do more than make a better educational environment, it will actually create people who want to be active in their community and develop into “responsible, informed citizens” (60).

Although debates and challenges are not a traditional concept in feminist pedagogy, Torrens and Riley make it work because they are calling for a more intense environment that will create more powerful results that extend beyond the classroom. Plus, the interaction between students and instructor in debate-like conversations invoke the true heart of feminist pedagogy—to get students participating and learning, all while doing everything possible to eliminate the existence of marginalized student voices. Even if the typical debate format does not work as well as the instructor hopes because of students’ natural tendency to agree with their peers and the mood of the classroom as

collaborative rather than confrontational, students can be encouraged to appreciate the differences and even spend some time arguing the side the initially disagreed with (Clark, et al. 132). It is highly possible as well, that students will connect with one another through these contested issues. These newly discovered commonalities could lead to group work in the classroom, and more importantly, could lead to the formation of partnerships for social action beyond the class assignments.

Thinking outside of the box and challenging one's own inherent set of beliefs is a natural part of a critical classroom. Questioning ideological foundations, common sense, and cultural hegemony opens room for further growth and development (Finke 160). Bringing what students know to the classroom, being able to share this knowledge with others, while at the same time, being receptive to other's input and ideas in order to challenge students' own automatic assumptions is vital to the process of thinking critically and sharing knowledge with others. Dianne Sadoff, in her essay "Framework, Materials, and the Teaching of Theory" explain that instructors should be encouraging students to challenge their own postulations such as "individuality as a natural rather than class-constructed concept, the social context as a given rather than as an interested and subject-producing category, and culture as a transcendent or ahistorical realm of value" (17).

Resistance to Critical Feminist Pedagogy

Regardless of the type of teaching schema instructors use and the amount of effort they put into carrying it out, they will likely find resistance from some students. This may

be especially true for feminist pedagogues because of the immediate negativity some people associate with the term “feminist.” This resistance usually stems from misinformation or a perception that being a feminist or teaching with a feminist style will form an exclusive “female only” club where only people with like beliefs are accepted. Feminist pedagogues can combat this negative reaction to “feminism” by explaining the inclusive nature of feminist pedagogy and by demonstrating the successful results in classrooms using feminist practices.

In traditional lecture and test-taking settings, students complain that they do not receive enough personal attention and are only expected to memorize and regurgitate answers on exams. Instructors using a feminist pedagogical style often meet resistance because students feel less in control of their grades and they may feel uneasy about heightened class participation. But, as Torrens and Riley explain, in feminist classrooms, if an instructor can get students to “actively buy into” (65) the classroom principles—even if for a short while, they will begin to recognize the freedom, control, and confidence they have gained.

Instructors who believe in feminist pedagogy and choose to use it in their classrooms have confidence that if they can get their students to subscribe to their methods, their students will see the results and will stop being so resistant. Some types of resistance should actually be viewed as encouraging because it shows engagement with the material and likely with the instructor. This engagement can likely lead to greater intellectual thinking, when probed, and become a contributing factor to the classroom

environment (Sadoff 17). Even if the student does not fully subscribe to the way of the class, their individual thinking about the pedagogy of the class may, in a roundabout way, lead to the same positive results.

As with any alternative teaching strategy, instructors often face resistance not only from their students, but also from their colleagues and, in some cases, institution itself. Dale Bauer, in her article “The Other ‘F’ Word: The Feminist in the Classroom,” describes the resistance she has faced as a feminist teacher trying to conduct her class under feminist principles. She says that both students and instructors mistake the purpose of feminist pedagogy when they say “that feminism is not a discipline, that gender issues are based on perspectives unsuitable for the labor of the intellectual” (386). Like Bauer, I believe that this is often something people say when they do not want to get involved and do not want to give learning a chance.

Bauer also contends that one of the most difficult challenges she faces as a feminist teacher is that people think there should be an “easy separation...between the private or personal and the public space” (385). But, because of this preconceived idea of necessary separation, much is omitted from both spaces. Students could benefit from some emotion from their private lives, and their private lives could benefit from some of their classroom knowledge. Bauer explains that she uses her identification as a feminist, both in the classroom and out, to educate her own students so they can come to a resolution between their public and private selves (385), and use both of those selves to positively impact their writing.

Another way to combat resistive students, as well as to further inspire students who *are* onboard with the pedagogical techniques of a feminist classroom, is through the careful selection of chosen readings for the class. Choosing class readings that foster a sense of social change and accomplishment—whether through the work itself or through the student’s own critique or interpretation—is a way to evoke feminist history and remind us that “women [, as well as other oppressed individuals,] “have always been agents of social change” (Finke 155). Providing inspiration from outside sources, as well as from students’ own thinking, is proof that they, like the people before them, have believed in themselves, improved their skills, and overcome the obstacles of oppression placed before them.

I am not advocating that every reading be of the overly optimistic variety cheering only for the people who have forged ahead through hard times. I believe readings that portray a mixture of those who have overcome, as well as those that leave room for student interpretation and critique, will lead to a well-rounded view of accomplishment and a heightened skill of critical thinking. Undoubtedly, as learners, we sometimes ascertain more from stories with negative outcomes and the thought process that follows. As Laurie Finke explains in her essay, “The Pedagogy of the Depressed,” sometimes the essays that portray negativity have the opposite intended effect on her students at first. Of course, she explains, “the disheartening checklist of social ills that might depress anyone: rape, sexual violence, abortion, racial inequality, the degradation of the environment,

intolerance, misogyny” (Finke 155) will initially instigate feelings of “hopelessness and powerless, which is the opposite of the empowerment” (Finke 155).

Finke deduces, however, that students often go through a cycle of depression because they are processing the information and contemplating the socially constructed theories that surround the problems. Once they can handle the theories and the meanings as they might apply to their own lives, students will have something to say. As feminist instructors, what they have to say is exactly what we want to hear. We want them to write about it regularly, talk about it, and think about it—which means that this initial depression turns into the positive results we are working toward. The depression and anger that may come from some readings, class conversations, or their own thoughts in their writing, may be exactly what is needed to go out and make something great happen to combat the “disheartening checklist” (155).

In helping students deal with readings and make the most of their thinking experience and writing process, Beverly Lyon Clark, et al. in her essay “Giving Voice to Feminist Criticism” explains that she sometimes provides framework for her students in the form of questions, she calls “maps” (126). These questions, such as, “Do women write differently? Do women favor different genres? Do women have a different tradition? Should women redefine the canon? How does gender intersect with class? How does gender intersect with race and sexual orientation?” (Clark 126) can help even the students who are resistant or apathetic become participatory. Also, the questions and answers help build bridges from the theoretical to the practical—putting student thinking

into practice. She says, however, when providing frames for assignments and reading, instructors must be careful not to follow their own “trajectory” (134), and instead make sure students are following their own. Clark says that getting students to express themselves about what they are reading and thinking elevates student confidence and is the best way for instructors to gain insight into their students (125). This insight will help instructors reach their students on a personal level, and hopefully will amplify the student experience and lessons learned during the semester.

Besides the resistance that may come from individual students within our classroom, is the resistance by students as a group, other professors, and even from the institution. One of the leading reasons students will resist an engaging type of classroom that values process over product and thinking over testing is because they get so used to the classes like the one I experienced in my very first college class. These classes, although overwhelming to students at first, begin to seem familiar and normal because they are so common in large academic institutions. It is more common for students to sit in seats silently taking notes while the instructor gives a lecture than it is for them to share their own knowledge and become a part of the conversation. Day after day, students attend these lectures, usually without the ability to ask questions, study their notes and books for exams, then regurgitate their newly memorized knowledge on a test. At the end of one’s college career, they have likely experienced more classes taught in this banking style of education than that of a more personal pedagogical style. That is unfortunate

because it means most students likely earn their college degree without questioning, thinking, or contributing.

Obstacles to Enacting Critical Feminist Pedagogy

Similar to the resistance feminist pedagogues must overcome to enact their pedagogical choices in an effective manner, there are obstacles, such as large class sizes, that instructors must overcome. In their 1992 article, “Feminist Teaching: Effective Education,” Shelley MacDermid, Joan Jurich, Judith Myers-Walls, and Ann Pelo deduce that, after a thorough examination of the misconceptions and attributes of feminist pedagogy, large class size is still a major barrier to effective feminist pedagogy (37). Large classes tend to silence student voices because there is no time for everyone’s perspective, so only the instructor’s opinions are heard, which the opposite desired effect as in feminist classrooms. Are there any solutions?

MacDermid, et al. propose solutions to this problem, such as not working in such a large university setting or using teaching assistants to divide the class, but those solutions are not always an option. In most cases, even if instructors do have the option of having teaching assistants to help with their class, it commonly stands as another barrier between student and instructor. As was true in the case of my first college class, my class had three teaching assistants. These assistants though were merely students who had made an ‘A’ in the same class in the previous year. On top of being less qualified than our tenured professor, who also held a law degree, we were told to only direct our

questions to one of our teaching assistants during the supplementary instruction sessions—rather than to the professor.

Since this article was written in 1992, before the immense insurgence of technology into academic settings, perhaps a new look of possible tools and solutions is warranted and could provide new answers to age-old problems. Looking at something that is commonly held as the truth through a new lens is an inherently critical feminist way of thinking. In trying to further the use of critical feminist pedagogy in composition classrooms, a possible solution is through the use of a contemporary tool like blogging. Blogging echoes and extends the already well-established boundaries of critical feminist thinking. In the following chapters of this project, I will explain in detail how I believe blogging can enact the theories of critical feminist pedagogues.

Journaling

Similar to blogging, a useful tool that did exist at the emergence of feminist pedagogy, and still is a staple in composition classrooms today, is journaling. Journaling is supposed to feel personal—like diary writing. Feminist instructors want students to feel at ease when they journal; they want students to enjoy the freedom of writing in an autonomous place free to express their inner voice, creativity, and thoughts. “The journal,” writes Kelley Dickerson Barnhardt and Elaine O’Quinn, in their article “Making Space for Girls,” “is a form of writing that easily enhances a feminist pedagogy while encouraging the growth and development of students not only as writers, but also as people” (par. 21).

Barbara Lyon Clark explains how she uses journals in her feminist classroom. Focusing on process over product, but still productivity and participation, she grades them with a check, check plus, or a check minus. The journal entries she prefers, and presumably the ones that receive check pluses, are the ones that “question a problem and explore possible answers and solutions” or “connect a work with student’s own experiences or connect a work of criticism with a work of fiction” (129). An interesting point Clark makes about her students’ journals is her method for and beliefs about sharing student journal entries. She writes, “Each week three or four members of the class distribute copies of that they have written and read them aloud” (129). This technique, she explains, helps students with their speaking skills and encourages dialogue and discussion among students.

Because journaling and feminist pedagogy strive to accomplish the same goals of expression and self-discovery, journaling is a natural fit for a feminist curriculum. And because of its commitment to self-discovery, feminism by nature is on a quest of self-discovery of it’s own—always refining, recreating, and solving old problems by looking at newly available answers. Freire explains that as educators, we must perceive ourselves as unfinished and incomplete beings who must continually reevaluate our circumstances, and we must teach our students to do the same (83-84). Upon reevaluating feminist pedagogy in a contemporary light, I propose that blogs could improve journaling, and thus feminist pedagogy. Unlike in Clark’s class where only a few students are able to share every once in awhile, blogs would allow every student entry to be shareable.

Instructors could require their students to blog short entries daily or several times a week. Depending on the writers' skill levels and the instructor's goals, the blog entries could be about something discussed in class, a response to a reading, a response to a class question, or possibly even about something the student chooses. Could yesterday's paper journal become today's blog?

Like Barnhardt and O'Quinn, who advocate using feminist pedagogy as a way to remove the marginalization of voices in the classroom, William Breeze, a male feminist, in his article "Constructing a Male Feminist Pedagogy," strives to prevent the marginalization of men as feminist instructors by describing his point of view. He addresses common misconceptions about feminism and provides a very interesting personal account of his experiences as a male feminist instructor teaching a course titled "Women and Writing." Breeze addresses problems feminists faces when all too often feminism is thought of as a realm for women only—and if there is a male feminist, he is a mere novelty (63). He says, "feminist pedagogy encourages both female and male students to reevaluate their perspectives on gender relations within their own social spheres" and can ultimately "lead to a broader view of authoritative knowledge within the academy" (71). This introspective examination enables students to grasp how they are others view them, how they view others, and what the world looks like from other peoples' points of view. The results of the introspection could possibly change resistant students' points of view to be more accepting of others and freer with their own identities.

Like Breeze, Deborah Jane Orr in her essay “Toward a Critical Rethinking of Feminist Pedagogical Praxis and Resistant Male Students,” explains that just as feminist pedagogical practices began initially to lessen the oppression of female student voices in the classroom, the application of feminist pedagogy needs to be applied carefully to not overlook the needs of male students as well (241). This is important point for feminist pedagogues to remember as they integrate feminist principles into their composition classrooms because unlike Florence Howe’s all-female composition classroom in 1971, most modern-day classrooms must accommodate both males and females. Orr explains that she ensures that her male students remain part of the feminist classroom by addressing the theoretical (the fact that dominant male identity as been historically and socially constructed since the beginning of time) and the practical (by having students discuss and write in class about their perceptions of gender roles in literature, such as those in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*) (250). These theoretical and practical solutions will promote the concepts of critical feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom by building students’ analytical skills, identity, expression, and by lessening the marginalization of both male and female students--while fostering the teaching of writing.

Breeze and Orr both bring interesting, and often neglected, perspectives to the conversation on feminist pedagogy. Perhaps if there were more male feminist represented in textbooks and in the classroom, students would have an easier time, like Barnhardt and O’Quinn said, accepting their own identities as feminists—whether male or female. Like

the incorporation of blogs into feminist classrooms, greater acceptance of male feminists would propel education, and possibly society, forward. Although I do not think it is important to inform our students, especially those in a first year composition course, about the specifics of the pedagogy we are choosing to use, (because frankly, that is not what they are there for), I do think that if we choose to share details about our the pedagogy we are using, we should certainly bring in some male feminist points of view. It is important for all students, but especially our male students, to know that the term “feminist” does not exclude them from the conversation, but it does quite the opposite—it embraces them.

In first-year composition classes, it may not be important to specifically label the pedagogical techniques we are employing, but letting students know the intentions behind our choices as feminist pedagogues will help them see our goals, help them realize how they can participate to meet those goals, and give them an overall guide to how we expect our class to operate. Even if the pedagogy is not labeled with a name, we certainly should be sharing that all students, regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, are valued as individuals. We want every single person in the room to know that we are happy they are here, we know they have something to contribute, and they have something to learn, and most importantly, that tolerance and understanding is expected in the classroom.

IDENTITY THEORY

The previous section established an understanding of feminist pedagogy as a teaching style that promotes acceptance and understanding of oneself and others in the classroom. In this section, I expand on this idea by taking a closer look at how identity, both of students and instructors, affect the goals of teaching composition in a feminist style. Typically, students have two basic identities—academic and social. In the past, many teachers have typically only valued and emphasized academic identity in the classroom. While I am not advocating social events during class, I do think composition instructors can harness what is great about most students' social identity with regard to the writing skills they have developed through electronic written communication with their friends. This is similar to the concepts of feminist pedagogy where students are encouraged to speak and teachers relinquish some of their power to make a more comfortable environment.

Embracing Students' Social Identities

Although most instructors can view their students as something more than students in their class, sometimes those alternate identities are clouded, or even ignored, in classroom settings. As Susan Sánchez-Casal and Amie McDonald purport, "In feminist classrooms where teachers encourage students to activate their ability to know through experience, the pursuit of truth is immediately politicized by the various and often competing assertions that students advance about their identities and our shared social world" (2). There is no denying that the social aspect of all of our identities is often a

greater part of us than our academic identity. So, without embracing both sides of ourselves, we are limiting our classroom experience and the prospect of greater shared knowledge if we try to keep social identity out of the classroom.

In Kenneth Burke's *Attitudes Toward History*, he explains the multiple identities in one's life are "merely a unique combinations of partially conflicting 'corporate we's'" and observes that while sometimes the "identities work fairly well together," "at other times they conflict, with disturbing moral consequences" (264). Burke's perspective is useful in helping us think through the identities students bring with them to the classroom. Just as Burke explains how people have two identities-- a "corporate" identity in which they identify themselves with the corporations in which they belong and a "family" identity—students have the same two identities: their corporate identity is that of the academy and their family identity is their social life.

By accepting the existence of the two identities Kenneth Burke identified, we can find the intersection between the academic and social identities in order to allow student's writing to flourish. Blogging may help us accomplish this. And in true feminist pedagogical fashion, the introduction of blogging in the composition classroom is not a movement to overtake the traditional classroom setting. It is merely a way to contribute to it with a contemporary writing tool that seems to be a natural fit to the principles of feminist pedagogy, as well as to further connect with students. In order to build confidence and develop a classroom based on updated feminist pedagogical practices, meeting students where they are means not just standing still.

Overcoming the “Prescribed” Identity

So often, too, student identities are shaped by the societal roles they have been prescribed. As Joan Bolker explains in her essay, “Teaching Griselda to Write,” many women, whom she has defined as “the Griseldas of the world” (50), are such extreme people-pleasers that even when they write, they only think of the audience. She says that these women strive “to please all and offend none, one which ‘smiles’ all of the time, shows very little of a thought process, but strives instead to produce a neat package tied with a ribbon” (51). Although tidy, these papers are robotic and boring. They do not elicit thought or provoke social action. Part of attending to student identity, especially in classrooms fighting against oppression, the “good girls club” is an identity worth recognizing and attempting, at all costs, to overcome.

Perhaps allowing the social aspect of student lives into the academic setting will help balance this notion of the oppressed academic identity by encouraging “the Griseldas” to mingle their social identities into their academic ones. Arguably, some women have a similarly oppressed identity in their social lives just as they do in their academic ones, but most do not embed the Griselda-like robotic quality in their social identities. Outside of academia, most females—especially those of younger generations, even if they are “people pleasers,” still know how to assert themselves, let their opinions be heard, and make sure their voice counts when it really matters. The problem is that when those same females enter a classroom, they begin “playing the game” the way they

think it should be played. That is, they perform the tasks the instructor is requesting and are careful to “color between the lines” to ensure their success.

Since Bolker’s essay was written in 1979, we have to examine some of the things that have happened in the last two decades to help more women become more assertive—even if primarily in their social identities rather than in their academic ones. One obvious change in the last twenty years since Bolker wrote about “Teaching Griselda to Write” is the onset of electronic communication. This form of communication can be an equalizer because it mitigates identity, and more importantly, mitigates those with identities or characteristics that have been oppressed. Many people feel a liberated sense of self as they communicate online. They have more control over their constructed identity and more time to decide what to share. These developing tools, as well as the natural progression of time, perpetuate the liberation of the Grisedlas, in their social identities, and can be adopted by composition instructors and the same benefits will work their way into classrooms.

Another technique that encourages the potential liberation of student voices in the classroom in a feminist pedagogical style is Barbara Lyon Clark’s theories of providing “maps” to her students to guide their thinking, conversations, and writing. She did so to stimulate her students’ creativity because as Florence Howe claims almost forty years ago, “students have historically been taught to play a passive role in the classroom. Howe writes, “such people may find it easier to be told what to do than to figure it out for themselves, or even to decide what they really *want* to do” [emphasis original] (35).

They go crazy.
 They kill
 themselves.
 They are deadly
 serious. (70).

This poem expresses the extreme feeling of inadequacy and hopelessness students who are oppressed and uncomfortable may feel. These feelings are part of their identity. They have been walking the “fine line” for their whole lives, and may have never been shown another way. Accepting them for whom they are while listening to them and valuing what they have to say may make them comfortable enough to express their own thoughts and feelings. This kind of deep expression is what teachers of critical feminist pedagogy strive for. It is why they go the extra mile to reach out and try to make something great happen.

Communities of Meaning

While we cannot expect all of our students to express their thoughts and feelings as masterfully as this student poet, we can try to value and understand the places where their identities and viewpoints came from. I can relate to what Annas, as well as her student, are conveying. Do I understand them because I am a woman and they are women? Perhaps, but it would be inherently oppressive to pretend or assume that all women feel the same or that all African Americans feel the same about their historical oppression because clearly, they do not. Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald suggest that feminist pedagogues do not limit student experience by lumping them together in “identity markers (such as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or nation)” (11), but by

creating “*communities of meaning*” [emphasis original] (11) in which students with like experiences or like beliefs (regardless of “identity markers”) can join together. In doing so, we are viewing students as individuals with their own set of experiences rather than profiling based solely on face value.

Admittedly, however, Sánchez-Casal and Macdonald agree that very often, students will still find themselves in nearly the same categories using the “communities of meaning” technique as the original “identity markers.” This is because people who are inherently similar often have similar beliefs. It is typically easier to identify with people who are most similar to you in gender, class, and race. Thus, as a white, middle-class woman, I must be careful not to see the world only through my point of view. Although difficult, seeing the world through someone else’s eyes is possible if we take the time to reflect upon ourselves as well as thoughtfully pay attention to those around us.

The Instructor’s Identity

Understanding and embracing student identity is important to foster a more productive and friendly classroom environment, but it is equally important to look at the instructor’s identity. This examination of the instructor’s identity may help identify students’ perceptions about their instructor and help the instructor become more aware of the impact their identity may be having on their classroom. For example, according to a study conducted by UCLA, greater than 90% of college educators are white. That means that most college courses are being taught by people who, as Peggy McIntosh describes in her insightful essay “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack,” “are taught

to think of their lives as a morally neutral, normative, and average, also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as a work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’” (2). McIntosh, a white woman educator, sheds light on how more than 90% of educators in America might be viewed by nonwhite students, who by traditional definition, fall into a category of possible oppression.

If this is the case, are we therefore disenfranchising the language of students when we are teaching them the accepted, ideal methods of composition--in other words, by teaching them the “white” way? Even activities that most people would see as altruistic good deeds, like job training for the indigent, can be seen as a way to indoctrinate and to homogenize. Sameness is not the goal. We are seeking ways to embrace all of our own unique identities in the composition classroom so that we can promote acceptance, learning, individual thinking, and better writing.

McIntosh identifies some of the daily effects of white privilege in her life--conditions she believes “*attack somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographical location*” [emphasis original] (2). They vary widely--from the ability to be in the company of other people of the white race most of the time to the fact that flesh colored Band-Aids are made to match white skin. While all of these privileges exist, they are not equal. Distinction must be made between the privileges that white people have that everyone should share, and the privileges that actually subjugate others. What must be left out of the classroom and what can be brought in?

McIntosh urges us to start by “distinguishing between positive advantages which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantages that unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies” (7). Whiteness theory and composition pedagogy remind us, to keep this ideal at the forefront of our discussions, and suggest how we can work to be constantly aware and vigilant of the inherent effects of white privilege, helping us realize where to make changes in our day-to-day lives and what privileges we need to strive to bring to all others.

A THOUGHTFUL PEDAGOGY

As with any type of classroom pedagogies, there will be success and failure. There will be students who thrive in the classrooms we plan and likely some who do not regardless of how much we try. Feminist pedagogy, as a whole, is a thoughtful way of teaching. It allows students to become part of the conversation and share some of the authority with their instructor.

Feminist pedagogues try to make conscious choices that will help students succeed and recognize their own abilities. We can accomplish this by looking at ourselves first—making sure that we think about what we bring into the classroom and how our students perceive us. We must take the time to carefully plan our lessons and assignments, and even let our students help guide them. We must treat every student as the individual they are by making them feel welcome and encouraged to share their work and ideas in a safe and comfortable setting. While all of their ideas may not always be

agreed with, they will be heard and treated with respect. Certainly, as a composition instructor, the bottom line is that we want to make better writers. We will focus on writing, and the task will only be made simpler through the employment of feminist pedagogy and technology.

I propose that blogs may help students build bridges between their social identities and their academic identities to further meet our goals of teaching students how to be better writers. We will be acknowledging their literacies that may, until today, only be recognized and valued outside of the classroom. We will encourage them to bring their knowledge into the classroom and share with others through a familiar technological medium. Students will be encouraged at our attempts to reach into their social world, while still maintaining the integrity of the classroom environment as a learning space. Most importantly, keeping blogs will keep students writing. All the while, our efforts will be furthering the already successful concepts of critical feminist pedagogy.

In Chapter Three, I will begin by assessing the state of the blogosphere by drawing on the findings of a 2008 study conducted by Technorati that assesses the amount of blogs on the internet, why people keep blogs, and who the bloggers are. Then, I take a look at how blogs promote writing and the benefits of bringing blogs into the classroom, such as the existence of technology encouraging a fluidity of learning that will improve student writing and student performance. At the end of Chapter Three, I consider the impact blogging in the classroom has on students and their work.

CHAPTER III

ENTERING THE BLOGOSPHERE: UNDERSTANDING THE PRACTICALITY AND EFFECTS OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

In the last chapter I focused on the roots and usefulness of feminist pedagogy. For decades, feminist pedagogy has been successfully employed in writing classrooms. The principles of feminist pedagogy are an especially natural fit when situated in composition classrooms. Writing, unlike some other subjects, is a learned skill. It is not something that can be memorized or mastered overnight. It takes patience to teach writing and patience to learn how to write for academia. As discussed in the previous chapter, most students are already writing daily. It may not be in the style that we necessarily want in our classrooms by standard definitions of “good academic writing,” but even the writing they are doing in their social lives counts. If we take a look at what students love (social networking through technology) and combine it with pedagogy that we know works, what we are left with is the option to integrate that technology into the writing students do into our classrooms.

In this chapter, I will first examine the “state of the blogosphere,” providing statistics about bloggers and usage that prove that blogging is big business, particularly for those of college age; then, I will assess the practicality of blogging in the classroom. What is it for? What can it do for the instructor? What can it do to help our students learn? And finally, I will begin to make connections between blogging and feminist

pedagogy by considering how blogging affects our students' work and attitudes, as well as the atmosphere of our composition classrooms.

THE STATE OF THE BLOGOSPHERE

"In 2004...the typical reaction to the word 'blog' was 'huh - can you repeat yourself?' Today, blogs are everywhere—even presidential candidates have blogs. The blog has forever changed the way publishing works—now anyone can be a publisher. The issue is no longer distribution; rather, it's relevance."

Brad Feld
Managing Director
Foundry Group

The word "blog" is a contraction of the term "weblog." By definition, it "is a website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries, commentary, description of events, or other material such as graphics or video" ("Technorati"). It has been just about ten years since the development of blogs, but like most things, it took a few years before it really took off. With the creation of blog hosting tools, like LiveJournal, WordPress, and Blogger, individuals started to gain access to free spaces and user-friendly templates to start their own blogs. In the last five years, we have seen a surge in blog creation, blog following, and blog maintenance. Whether kept by a soccer mom as a way to keep her friends and family updated on her children's happenings, or by a Fortune 500 CEO, "blogging" has become a familiar term, as well as a daily addiction for writers and followers alike. With more than 133 million blogs now online (expanded from 70 million the year before), there is no doubt that more people are writing, reading, and socializing in ways never seen before ("Technorati").

Why People Blog

According to Technorati's report called [The] "2008 State of the Blogosphere" the top reasons for blogging are self-expression and sharing expertise, followed by activism, book publicity, personal satisfaction, self-promotion, sharing a passion, to earn expert status, and even to "bake half-baked ideas." Given the wide variety of reasons people blog, it is not surprising that the group that makes up hundreds of millions of bloggers is not a homogenous group, but according to Technorati, very diverse group of affluent, educated, and influential individuals. Three out of four bloggers, they purport, are college graduates, and nearly half have attended graduate school.

Who Are the Bloggers?

According to Technorati's 2008 report, nearly two-thirds of bloggers are men-- despite the fact that internet users are equally male and female. Women bloggers are more likely to keep a personal blog than men, and the topics they choose to write about are more likely to be personal in nature, such as "personal musings and family updates." 75% of women write in a conversational style, compared to 59% of men. Women, also, are more likely than men to convert their blog into a business opportunity, make connections with others, and sell advertising on their blog ("Technorati"). The various uses of blogs, and the various people who use them, is a true reflection of the empowerment of the internet to provide an outlet to whomever wants one.

Blogs as a Promotion of Writing

Blogs are a thriving source for information-seekers and writers alike, and although the uses for which bloggers blog are so widely varied, there is still another use for blogging that exists, but seems less discussed. No matter the content or the purpose, the staple of blogs is writing. Without writing, even if heavily supplemented with links, videos, and pictures, blogs would not exist. In an age where hand written letters seem to have gone by the wayside, and more and more people communicate merely in 160 character increments through SMS text messaging, we, as writers and composition instructors, should consider the implications of embracing a technology that promotes writing and sharing of information. We should find a way to bring it in our classrooms and use its soaring popularity to our advantage. In the following section, I will discuss how blogging is being used in the classrooms, as well as the possibilities for expanding its usage in the writing classroom settings.

THE PRACTICALITY OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

The previous section established the prevalence of blogs and their various uses on the web. And because it has been found that most bloggers are highly educated people, it seems like a natural fit for the usefulness of blogs to spill over into academia. Will Richardson, in his book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, identifies the many uses blogs have in classroom settings. Although he recognizes that the use of blogs in academia is still in its infancy, he notes that blogs are

already being used for class portals, online filing cabinets, e-portfolios, collaborative spaces, knowledge management articulation, and as school websites (21). The practical uses in the classroom will continue to grow as more instructors are willing to experiment with them.

Technology as a Motivator

Greg Weiler, for example, explains the limitless uses of blogs in the classroom. He describes the many ways in which blogs can be used in academia--whether as personal journals or as a collaboration tool among students. They undoubtedly facilitate student-centered learning. Weiler writes, "In some cases the technology itself can be a motivating factor, allowing students to experience writing in a way that may be different from how they view traditional learning at school" (74). This "motivating factor" is part of the recognition of students' identities not just as composition students, but that of a person with individual ideas to express, and likely a social person who is comfortable and familiar communicating in a electronic mediums.

Embracing Electronic Communication

Instead of embracing the way students are used to writing online, all too often, English teachers talk about the hardships electronic communication habits have placed on their students' writing style. I have heard multiple conversations between teachers explaining that students have used emoticons (e.g. ☺ and :-P) and text speak/txtspk (e.g. cu l8r and btw) in their research papers. Instead of dwelling on the "harm" electronic communication is causing, what would happen if we embraced it and learned to harness

it? After all, it is reality; we are living with technology. I am not advocating that we allow smilies in research papers, but perhaps we should focus on the good that technology is having on student writing. First, they are actually writing. Second, they are communicating. Third, they are sharing ideas. And last but not least, they are learning (and perhaps teaching us) new literacies. If we can embrace these advantages, despite the academy's aversion to emoticons (*gasp*), we can use it to our advantage and create great spaces for students to write, learn, and be heard.

The Prevalence of Connectivity

Seven years ago, 86% of college students were already online ("Pew"), and today, because so many courses have web pages, forums, drop boxes, grade books, wikis, and message boards, it is hard to imagine that 100% of college students are not online on nearly a daily basis. The already existent popular presence of technology in college classrooms across the country shows academia's willingness to move toward it. Therefore, it does not seem farfetched at all to think about the ways blogs might be usefully integrated into classroom practice.

Fluidity of Learning

Like Burke's notion of multiple identities, Dale Bauer speaks of the benefits of using feminist pedagogy to help reconcile students' personal and public selves to get more out of life. This notion of recognizing the personal/social self inside the classroom is exactly what Weiler describes as the "motivating factor" for students to want to learn because typically, they love their personal/social lives more. Being sensitive to the fact

that students and instructors have identities outside of their roles as scholars could actually enhance the classroom experience, and thus, enhance the learning.

If Weiler is right and blogs help students experience the full complexity of writing rather than writing as only a school activity, then blogs are consonant with feminist pedagogy, which emphasizes a fluidity of learning. In Dawn Hogue, Ted Nellen, Nancy Patterson, and Patricia Schulze's 2004 article "CyberEnglish," they describe their "CyberEnglish" classrooms as spaces that "embrace listservs, chat rooms, discussion boards, and instant messages, not to mention Web building, as ways for our students to exchange ideas, drafts of writing, and reading reflections" (70). Although blogs are not mentioned specifically by name (likely due to their soaring popularity since this article was published), the observations about the benefits of the infusion of technology into the standard composition classroom are extremely timely and applicable. The article "CyberEnglish" is co-authored by four experienced teachers. Their points of view are each listed individually and are presented in a "community voices" format—which in many ways is similar to the fluidity of text on the web.

Hogue, et al. discuss how they are subversives who "shook off the dust of the traditional classroom" by integrating technology into their English classrooms (70). They explain how digitizing texts and publishing their texts online converts the classroom from a passive one to an active one. Just as Torrens and Riley called for active participation in their feminist classrooms, these teachers—who focus on technology more than feminism—are calling for the same thing through technology. Will Richardson echoes

this concept by explaining that unlike traditional websites that are, for the most part, “static chunks of content” (18) (as are, in my opinion, most types of student work), blogs are updated—sometimes everyday and they “engage with ideas and questions and links. They ask readers to think and respond. They demand interaction” (18). This demand for interaction is the same plea for interaction that feminist pedagogy makes.

The fluidity and malleability these authors describe is similar to what Jay David Bolter explains in his book *Writing Space*. He writes, “the fixity and permanence that printing seemed to give to the written word was just as important in changing the nature of literacy. By contrast, our culture regards digital texts as fluid and multiple structures. If this fluidity seems to offer new possibilities of expression, then writers and readers will put up with some inconveniences to use it” (9). Like Hogue, et al., Richardson, and Bolter express, it is this fluidity and ability to change and layer text that is inspiring to students.

Comfort with Technology

Although Bolter acknowledges that some people perceive technology as an inconvenience, most college students, as the “Pew Internet American & American Life Project” found, have been raised around and are familiar and comfortable with technology. In fact, in situations where there is uneasiness about the use of technology in the classroom, it is usually on the part of the instructor—not the student. The instructor likely did not grow up on technology the same way their students have, so most students will feel the opposite of uneasiness about using technological mediums, such as blogs,

because it will feel familiar and exciting. The students that we are talking about use technology for information, communication, entertainment, and just about everything else in their lives.

THE EFFECTS OF BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

Beyond the tools blogs can provide educators and to their students, this section will focus on the impact blogging can have on student work and the outlook in the classroom. The practical reasons for adding blogging into the classroom may be reason enough for some composition instructors to experiment with them in the classroom, but certainly after researching the benefits blogging can bring not only to students' work and attitude, and even further enact the goals of feminist pedagogy (as I will discuss in the following chapter), it will be obvious that blogging belongs in composition classrooms.

The Impact on Students

What exactly will blogs do for students? A study called "Brain of the Blogger," conducted by Drs. Fernet and Brock Eide, finds that blogging has a significantly positive impact blogging on students. They found that blogs can:

- Promote critical and analytical thinking
- Be a powerful promoter of the creative, intuitive, and associational thinking
- Promote analogical thinking
- Be a powerful medium for increasing access and exposure to quality information
- Combine the best of solitary reflection and social interaction

Most composition instructors, especially critical feminist pedagogues, constantly work toward these results. Critical and analytical thinking, the Eides find is promoted by

the active process that blogs create. Writers must spend some time crafting their thoughts and their words into cohesive entries. The electronic medium also enables students to enter into a new dimension of writing with the introduction of videos and pictures. Making text, videos, and pictures enhances associational thinking. Bloggers' creativity is stimulated every time a new entry is created because of the constant need to create something new. The Eides find that blogs promote analogical thinking by the information and interaction provided by blogs. They say that the vast information available by experts makes people think more than ever before. Also, the ability to interact with and continuously follow these experts will hone their own thinking skills. Lastly, the Eides argue that blogs combine the best of working alone and working with others in classroom spaces.

The Publishable Nature of Blogs

Just as books became less expensive to publish with the inception of the printing press, the ability to self-publish in a sharable (and usually free) forum further decentralizes the power of just a select few. This isn't to say that we expect our students' blogs to become the equivalent of the next "great American novel." Instead, we hope by embracing their ability to publish their own work online, they will take a greater sense of pride and ownership in their work. Will Richardson explains that students, just knowing that their work is no longer confined to the classroom, can be significantly more motivated to plan their assignments and more thoughtfully contemplate their responses to their classmates' work (28).

Similarly, Richardson says that this same relevance can encourage instructors to also consider the meaning of the assignments they are asking their students to do (28).

Perhaps they have used the same assignment or prompt for years and years without really considering what it means to the students or how it would be seen by others outside of the classroom. This positive pressure to reconsider and rethink old practices and assignments may eventually do exactly what we are hoping blogs can do for feminist pedagogy—update and consider contemporary advantages.

The same concept of publishing student work applies to the benefits of providing archives, or portfolios of student work. Richardson explains that “blogs archive the learning that teachers and students do, facilitating all sorts of reflection and metacognitive analysis that was previously much more cumbersome” (28). At the end of the semester, instructors could create an assignment or review process where students go back and look at the entries they have made in their blogs. They will likely be impressed (and given confidence) by the amount of entries they were able to make. Likewise, students will be able to see the progress they have made in their writing and critical thinking abilities. Some students may even be so inspired by their collection of academic work that they continue to add to it throughout their college experience. When I decided to go back to graduate school nearly five years after finishing my undergraduate work, it certainly would have been nice to have an archived places online that I could go back and view all of my work in one place. Instead, I spent days sifting through papers and even re-typing papers for which I could no longer find the electronic files.

A Web of Knowledge

Just as Drs. Fernette and Brock Eide established, blogs help develop knowledge through the vast amount of information available by well-respected professionals. Students can follow blogs by academics, attorneys, doctors, businesspeople, technophiles, and just about anyone else they can imagine. In the same vein, students, as Richardson says, can become experts in their own areas of interests through the use of an academic blog (28). Depending on the specific ways the instructor chooses to use the blogs in their classroom, students should have the freedom to creatively move within the space they are given. This freedom of thought and research will help students find their own areas of interest, and even if each entry is about something altogether different, they may in the end, see a common theme in their responses, and come to a solid conclusion about their interests.

Giving Students a Voice

Blogging in the classroom thus enacts feminist pedagogy through its use as a “democratic tool that supports different learning styles” (Richardson 28). This will allow students who are not verbose participants to still have their opinions heard. In a blog, everyone can have a voice in the conversation. If 25 students in one classroom are keeping their own blogs, no one is talking over anyone like they are when they are in a traditional academic setting. Furthermore, everyone is participating. Creating assignments for students to read one another’s blog entries and comment on a few will facilitate a new form of “listening.” This will enable all students, all voices, even the

voice of the instructor, to have a contributing voice in the classroom conversation (Richardson 28).

To make the most out of accepting student identities in the classroom, as well as making the most out of blogging as a tool to encourage students to write often, composition instructors might want to consider giving their students some freedom to write on topics of their choice. Of course, some entries will be guided—like responses to outside readings, but to make use of the casual and familiar appeal of blogging, instructors may, at times, just want to leave the topics up to the students, or merely guide them their entries with open-ended questions.

In the following chapter, I delve deeper into the intersection of feminist pedagogy and blogging to take a closer look at how blogs enact feminist pedagogy. The ideas about how blogs can be incorporated into classroom curriculum, as well as the effects it has on student work and attitudes, provides the perfect backdrop for seeing the impact the blogosphere has on the underpinning of feminist pedagogy.

CHAPTER IV

WITNESSING THE ENACTMENT: FEMINIST PEDAGOGY ENTERS THE BLOGOSPHERE

In the last three chapters, I outlined the framework of critical feminist pedagogy and blogging in the classroom to show how blogs in composition classrooms can enact critical feminist pedagogy. I began this thesis by situating my interest, developed through my personal experiences and my current scholarship, in the application and study of feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom. In Chapter Two, I examined the roots of feminist pedagogy and the useful critical feminist classroom practices instructors have used for decades. I identified common misconceptions about feminist pedagogy, as well as how feminist pedagogy cries for students to seek social action. Then, I examined the role of student identity in the classroom, and how it relates to feminist pedagogy, as well as how we can appeal to students' social identities through the use of technology in the classroom.

In Chapter Three, I evaluated the soaring state of the blogosphere, as well as the general applications of blogs in the classroom. I demonstrate that blogging can directly impact student work, attitude, and the atmosphere of the classroom. With the solid foundation built, Chapter Four seeks to show how blogs enact feminist pedagogy by:

- fostering an environment to lessen the marginalization of student voices,
- developing fluid and layered texts that are updatable and immediately shareable,
- acknowledging students' academic and social identities,
- recognizing students' multiple literacies and teaching/sharing new ones, and
- encouraging greater, more frequent student interaction.

The following sections explore, in greater detail, the ways in which the points above enact feminist pedagogy.

LESSENING THE MARGINALIZATION OF STUDENT VOICES

As I discussed at the end of the last chapter, one of the most important aspects of blogging in composition classrooms is that it has the potential to lessen the marginalization of student voices. The web is an expansive space with potential room for everyone. There is room for all different types of ideas, writers, and bloggers. It caters to those who are bursting at the seams to share their knowledge, as well as those who are hesitant and timid. Writing a blog allows you to be “yourself”—if you want to, or you can be someone else. As composition instructors, we are not concerned with the face of the writer as much as the fact that the student is writing, sharing, and participating. As feminist pedagogues, we certainly hope that our assignments, such as blogging, can facilitate a student’s search for confidence, for their own beliefs, and for their own “voice.” It is quite possible, however, even the reluctant few will come around with practice and time.

Because blogs are in need of constant updates, students will get lots of practice writing and sharing. It is my hope that even students who would not typically share aloud with their peers will gain the confidence to do so by this slow and easy sharing process. Blogs allow students to write in their own time and while alone. They are alone with their thoughts, which will help develop their independent critical thinking skills. When it is

time for the sharing to come, they are put more at ease because they are not face to face with their reader. They will be less worried about sharing because it will be done at a different time and place—at the reader’s convenience. Plus, they have the added benefit of being able to read their classmates’ blog entries. In most cases, this will likely boost student confidence because they will see that their work is in alignment with those of their peers. For some reason, if a student’s work is not in alignment with their peers’ work, they will be able to see that as well. This will encourage many students to put forth more effort in their own work, learn from their peers’ mistakes and successes, and develop stronger analytical skills (Langer, et al. 20). As composition instructors who want to help our students improve their writing skills and assignments, we will be thankful for this realization as well. The feminist pedagogue will assure these students that there is hope for them to improve their writing. To do so, we can offer and encourage assistance, such as teacher conferencing and visits to the writing center. In either case, students’ writing and thinking skills will benefit from this sharing type of collaboration.

FLUID AND LAYERED TEXTS THAT ARE UPDATEABLE AND SHARABLE

One of the most exciting things about blogging is the easy ability to augment regular text with electronic enhancements. For as long as classrooms have existed, students have been writing papers—just as I am doing now. Actually, for most of that time, students put pencil to paper without the ability to cut and paste and delete and save electronically. In either case, writing has been a somewhat stagnant process. Once

written, it is difficult to change or to update. We see books all of the time with new editions because the world has changed while the book has stayed the same.

With blogs, students are able to provide updates about a recent discovery or share a new way to think about something. For example, if a student is reading a book, their first entry may be a reflection of the first chapter. They may have questions or general comments, but as they continue reading the book and reading their classmates' responses, they may change their ideas and questions. We will be able to see this evolution throughout the thread on their blog. Similarly, these short updated quips are far less intimidating for new writers than assigning long papers. I know, as composition instructors, we will still assign long papers for our students to write, but like a diary, a blog entry could just take a few minutes and not seem as daunting to students.

In blogs, students are able to stretch their critical thinking skills by thinking of ways to enhance their texts. They can add graphics or their own photographs to further explain their meaning. Or in the nature of embracing literacy, they could even create their own artwork and display it on their blog. Visual aids are enticing, and in reality, will take students more time and additional thoughtfulness to integrate into their written compositions. This is not a negative, however, because it helps achieve exactly what we want from our students. The ideas behind the text and the supplementary aides have to connect and support one another. Most importantly, however, the ideas have to make sense to the reader as well as to the writer. We will have to train our students to be astute in their choices, and to make sure their choices are complementary to their text rather

than a distraction. These lessons are worth teaching because students will be thinking and using their associational thinking skills to round out their ideas.

As with all things on the internet, blogs provide a useful and simple ability to link to other sites. Perhaps a student links their blog to another student's blog they are referencing or responding to, or perhaps they find outside links that help support their thoughts to make their blogs more user-friendly. Maybe a student starts reflecting on a news story they heard that morning. The student could link to the story in the newspaper, write their thoughts, and maybe even link to definitions or other sites where other people were discussing something similar. This web of information is a user-friendly way to blog and it makes entries more interesting because there is a greater depth of information. Also, it ties everything together, which allows reader to conduct more research in an interconnected web if they choose.

In our technological age, we are used to things happening instantly. Blogging provides that same immediate gratification we all love so much. It is possible to write something and have it published online within moments. And just minutes after posting, the blogger could receive comments from readers about their entry. This works especially well in academic settings because college classes are not held everyday. In some cases, college classes are only held once a week. The ease of publishing student work helps keep the class moving throughout the week despite the physical distance or separation of students and students with their instructor.

The Pressures of Sharing Work

I would be remiss not to mention the amount of possible added pressure blogging could create for students who are less comfortable sharing their work. Blogging is a public forum, and I can imagine that there are students who would just as soon write a paper with the confidence of knowing that only one person (their instructor) will read it instead of electronically posting their work to share with the class. Perhaps this reluctance stems from a fear of being judged or maybe a fear that their ideas or writing skills are not up to par, but the asynchronous sharing in blogs may help alleviate some of those fears. And once students begin posting their work time after time, they will soon realize that they are not being judged harshly. After all, in a feminist environment, this sharing is part of the process of preventing voices from being silenced, so sharing will be praised for effort, and the only criticism that will be given is constructive because the goal is to improve student writing and self-awareness.

In my first semester of graduate school, I was given the assignment of posting reading responses on a class message board. Having been out of college for several years, I had gotten out practice of reading loads of heavy academic material then crafting thoughtful and critical responses. So not only was I nervous about writing the responses at all, I was even more nervous that I had to post them for my entire class to read. The second part of the weekly assignment was to respond to two of my classmates' posts. Once I began reading the posts of my peers, although they were thought provoking and smartly written, I felt more assured that I had done well writing my assignment too. From

then on, I had the confidence that I could participate not only in the message board “conversations,” but more importantly, in class conversations as well. Having the ability to read my classmates’ reading responses on a weekly basis helped expand my critical thinking skills because I realized how many different ways there were to look at the same piece of work. Moreover, I believe our class discussions were much stronger than they would have been without reading one another’s posts because we became to know each other’s strengths and interests in a personal way that helped facilitate lively weekly discussions.

Moreover, this “added pressure” students feel may, in turn, lead to better and more thoughtful writing. Students who are less comfortable with sharing, and possibly even those who are comfortable, will probably take an extra few minutes to organize their thoughts, craft their sentences and paragraphs, and spend a few more minutes reviewing their work before hitting the “publish” button. As we discussed earlier, this “added pressure” may make for an all around more thoughtful class because even the instructor has the added pressure to create assignments he or she is willing to have the world see. This thoughtfulness could lead to a more thoughtfully planned class with stronger assignments, as well as a class full of students contributing a little extra effort to produce better work.

ACKNOWLEDGING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Students already write more than they think they do. Most likely, they write socially everyday when update Facebook, write emails, instant message, and “tweet” on Twitter. Even for many of these same students, there is a disconnect between their comfort with social writing and their academic writing. Some students get nervous, inhibited, and unable to write freely like they do when they write socially. As I have discussed, integrating blogs in the composition classroom can potentially enact feminist pedagogy by helping these students recognize and value their experience as social writers and bring some of their relaxed social writing skills into the academic writing setting.

Obviously, there *is* a difference between social writing and academic writing. Students are expected to use sources, think of applicable topics, formulate articulate sentences, and piece together fluid and relevant texts. However, embracing the social identity of students would lend itself to a greater flow of ideas, which produces more words and gives students a place to start—even in academia. This inclusive perspective on student identity and the recognition that there is something greater to be discovered is feminist pedagogy in action.

Critical feminist pedagogy aims to embrace everyone as contributors and active class participants. Applying this philosophy to the composition classroom will enable a greater portion of students' identities to positively influence their academic work. This acceptance of students' social selves will possibly bring out the more confident and outgoing personality that is often withheld from the classroom. Blogs could provide a

way to bridge the gap between students' social and academic identities. For the most part, when students are writing socially, they are writing in an electronic medium; therefore, blogs are a natural extension of what they are already used to. Furthermore, blogs could lend an informal element to traditional academic writing. Like journaling, blogs enact feminist pedagogy by encouraging frequent, informal ideas—which allows students to express themselves, find out their interests, interact with their peers and instructor all while improving their thinking and writing skills.

RECOGNIZING EXISTING AND LEARNING NEW LITERACIES

As I have established, most college students are already technologically savvy. That is to say, they are savvy at managing their social networks on sites like Facebook and Twitter, as well instant messaging their friends. They are comfortable sharing pictures via email and picture mail on their cell phones, and they do not think twice about holding video chats with friends. They are not, however, always as equally technologically savvy when it comes to using the web for academic purposes. The massive amount of information is really too much for most of us to grasp even as adults who have spent years trying. Part of the technological know-how we can try to teach our students is how to harness the information, how to determine the trustworthiness of sources, and how to incorporate all of that into their blogs. This will not only be beneficial for the classroom because we will have blogs that are well planned and

cohesive and papers without reputable sources, but the students will develop internet skills that they will use throughout their academic careers and throughout their lives.

Beyond this ability to decipher loads of information is the ability to actually use the technology. I took a computer class during my junior year in college. One of the main projects was to design a personal webpage. Keep in mind that this was in 2001, so for me, and most students in my class, this was a colossal task. We were not allowed to use a webpage-building template (although even those, back then, were no where near as easy to use as they are now); we actually had to study basic HTML code to create things like text boxes and blinking clipart that could scroll across the page. I remember working day and night on my project and being so proud when I actually finished it. As expected, when I went to class to present mine, there were many students with flashier, more sophisticated pages, but mine was not the most basic either. Despite the daunting task of delving into a new technology, I did it. And my skills and confidence soared because of it.

It seems as if in every class, there is a student or a group of students who are already experts at something being assigned. In the case of technology, very often, there is student in the class who has already developed many of these skills—sometimes even beyond the expertise of the instructor. As instructors, we need to embrace this knowledge and come to recognize it as a literacy our student has. It is through this recognition and appreciation that we should be encouraging them to share their skill with the class. This is a perfect opportunity to let a student's literacy shine. Certainly, most students need help

setting up their first classroom blogs and perhaps they will even some guidance getting started on their first few posts. Of course, the instructor will be there to help, but in the spirit of a feminist classroom, it will be important to let the students who already have the technological skills share them with their less technologically skilled classmates.

Just as students who have technological skills are able to share, so are other students with other unique literacies. Maybe students who are literate in another language can talk about what it is like for them to be bilingual, or if the instructor allows, the bilingual students might use some of their other language in their work. Perhaps a student is a skilled photographer or musician, then those skills too, could be incorporated into their blog by augmenting their text with their own music or photographs. Not only are they embracing their own skills as literate students, they are taking on a role of instructor. They are sharing their talents with the class, and because it is published online, they are, in essence, sharing their talents with the world. This sharing of skills helps students recognize their own abilities and helps build their confidence when they are able to share what they know with others. This is especially important in feminist classrooms because it helps show our students that we understand that there is different side to them than just the people who are sitting in our composition classroom. It shows them that while they may not yet be superior compositionists, we recognize that they are good at other things. And truthfully, that we realize that the other things they are good at may be a tool for improving their writing as well.

As instructors, we will individually be able to decide how we can use the literacies of our students to help guide the teaching of the class. I think it is important, however, for this to be a staple in student blogging assignments. It is a very feminist idea, which also stimulates interaction and thinking, and will be an easy construct to introduce our students to. The most important thing we can do as instructors is to help every student find something they are good at and something they can share. Whether large or small, let them bring their literacy into the classroom. It will facilitate conversation, decenter authority, and bolster student confidence.

ENCOURAGING GREATER, MORE FREQUENT INTERACTION

The immediate shareability of blogged information helps promote frequent interaction. In the most basic uses in a composition classroom environment, instructors could have students respond to a few of their classmates' blog posts each week. This is a crucial minimum to ensure that students are reading each other's posts. This means that the once marginalized student voices are no longer marginalized in the same sense because their work is being read. These comments are also important because they help establish an interaction between participants that is integral in feminist classrooms. As previously mentioned, feminist pedagogues will only accept students to be respectful of other students' ideas. It is okay to disagree respectfully and share reasons why, but it is not okay to be harsh or rude. Minor debates among students, however, makes for better interaction, and should be encouraged.

Very typically, in blogs that I read, when a person reads a post and makes a comment that disagrees with author, the author will make a comment responding to the commenter's opinion. Sometimes when necessary, the author will even decide to formulate a more substantial reply in the form of another blog post. This asynchronous commentary is a healthy way to keep students thinking and writing throughout the week. These interactions are virtual conversations. The instructor can read the entries, as well as the comments, and use them as a guide for conversation during live class sessions. This interaction will allow learning to go on throughout the week and will even help build relationships between students. These relationships, as I previously mentioned, could lead to partnerships for social action or at least friendships that could extend beyond the classroom.

Will Richardson in his book, *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Tools for the Classroom*, takes the interaction happening in blogging to another level. He tells a story of how he had his students asking questions in their blog entries about a book they were reading. When they reached the end of the book, Richardson emailed the author to ask her if she would respond to the students' questions. The author, he explained, not only answered the questions, but she went on to share how she formed her characters and how to come to write many of the book's important scenes. He says, "Since then, our students have collaborated with Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists, elementary school kids in Georgia, high school students in Poland, theater troupes in Oklahoma, and the list goes on" (25). This valuable interaction with people beyond the walls of the classroom is

what bringing technology into the classroom is all about. Not only did Richardson provide his students a unique experience to learn more from different people and groups of people, he showed them the possibilities of technology and what having the confidence to ask people for what you want can bring.

HIDDEN FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN THE CIRCLE OF EDUCATION

A few months ago, I was explaining my thesis topic to a family friend who just retired from teaching elementary school-aged children for the past thirty years. I explained the ways in which I felt blogging could enact feminist pedagogy. Semi-comfortable with the term “blogging,” she began questioning what feminist pedagogy meant. I explained how feminist pedagogy is a teaching technique instructors use to make sure all of their students’ voices are heard. We talked about decentering the instructor’s authority and making students part of conversations and class. She seemed perplexed, and said, “Isn’t that what all teachers try to do?” And it dawned on me that feminist pedagogy, simplified in the most basic terms, boils down to thoughtfulness. Of course, as I have explained in this thesis, there are far more intricacies to feminist pedagogy than thoughtfulness, but instructors who are thoughtful, value their students, and want their students to learn about the subject matter, as well as build their life skills is at its essence, practicing some of the most important principles of feminist pedagogy.

Her comment inspired me to think a little more about what teaching in an elementary school classroom would be like. Often, there is tape on the floor forming the

shape of a circle for each child to sit on, teachers bending down to meet their students at eye-level, and show and tell sessions. Not to over-simplify feminist pedagogy, but there are some definite parallels between the way we begin our education experience in elementary school and the feminist principles I am advocating be practiced in college composition classrooms. We, too, want our students to be part of the conversation, so we arrange our classrooms so that no one is physically excluded in conversation. So, sitting in a circle to join our students and to meet them at their eye level is part of our feminist practice. And show and tell? We mirror the concepts of show and tell when we encourage students to share their unique literacies in our classes.

In saying all of this, I do not mean that college composition classrooms are the same as elementary classrooms because, obviously, they are not. I am merely pointing out that the techniques that work so well with young children who are just beginning their educations does not have to stop working just because those same children got older. We can just update and increase the sophistication of these practices to make them meaningful and applicable to the college classroom. Certainly, we want our students to feel like the adults they are, so we must treat them as such—both with respect and expectations. Perhaps, however, we can learn something about our pedagogical practice from other successful teachers regardless of what age level they are teaching.

Blogging is one example of how these practices can be made more sophisticated for college composition classrooms. We are increasing our students' knowledge by stretching their skill sets and introducing them to (in most cases) something new. We are

expecting them to keep up with their blogs without the constant reminder by the instructor. We are facilitating the teaching of writing by expecting them to write more than ever before. And we are giving them a voice that cannot, no matter what, be silenced by others. This voice, because it will be “published” online, will be heard “louder” than their voice ever has been heard in academia. This will instill a sense of pride, ownership, and confidence.

Feminist pedagogy, as well as trying something new in our classrooms, requires an active approach to teaching. Certainly, it would be simpler to stand up in front of our students everyday and lecture about sentence structure and MLA format. It has been done a million times before, but how much did it accomplish? Perhaps the students learned a little because they were a captive audience with no choice but to listen, but what did they learn about writing? Writing is a skill that is learned by practice and guidance. We can give the guidance based on our own knowledge and experiences, as well as resources from other scholars. The practice part, however, is the key component that is often lacking in college classrooms. Four papers in a semester is not enough writing. We do not want our students to spend so little time writing that they never really get the hang of it. We want them to write a lot. Through the use of blogs, students will be encouraged to write on several times a week, but still in a manageable amount. And through this process, they will start to get comfortable with the generation of ideas and build their self-confidence.

This thesis has provided a through examination of feminist pedagogy and blogging, and has strived to show how blogging can enact feminist pedagogy. It is with a heightened sense of awareness and thoughtfulness that we can make feminist pedagogy a reality in our classrooms. This awareness will also allow us to make choices to integrate contemporary tools like blogs into our classrooms to provide a complete learning experience for our students and a successful teaching experience for ourselves. We depend on past histories to shape our thoughts about the present; what has worked those who have taught before us can certainly lend a hand in shaping the way we teach. Looking at the present, and even slightly into the future, should be no different. What is working in other parts of life may be able to work in academia too. So, for where we are right now, we tip our hats to the feminist pedagogues who have paved the way for us to be successful teachers, while at the same time, we evaluate our present state and join the hundreds of millions of bloggers around the world to teach with technology.

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